



2016 POINTS OF EMPHASIS

STRIKE ZONE (FP)

The NFHS Softball Rules Committee believes that improvements have been made in helping umpires identify the strike zone for each hitter. Additional work on this issue is needed to make the game fair for all hitters. There is no such thing as a common strike zone for all hitters.

The strike zone for fast-pitch is the space over any part of home plate which is between the batter's forward armpit and the top of the knees when the batter assumes a natural batting stance. Any part of the ball passing through the strike zone in flight over the plate shall be considered a strike. The umpire shall determine each batter's strike zone according to the batter's usual stance.

The NFHS Softball Rules Committee reinforced its support of the Rule and encourages umpires to call the strike zone according to the Rule.

DP/FLEX EDUCATION

Coaches and umpires across the country have expressed confusion regarding the DP/FLEX (3-3-6). The NFHS Softball Rules Committee reinforced its support of the rule and encourages coaches and umpires alike to utilize the resources available that thoroughly explain the rule and even provide some strategies for using the rule. The DP/FLEX rule was originally adopted because it provides more participation opportunities for student-athletes and more flexibility to coaches.

- A. For Coaches – Basic Rules to Remember. Keep these basic rules in mind:
 - 1. Decide the 10 players you want to be designated as starters: 1) list the nine players you want to have in the batting order on lines 1 through 9; 2) list the name of the remaining player (FLEX) on the tenth line.
 - 2. Fill in the defensive positions and list the player not initially playing defense as the DP.
 - 3. When making lineup changes:
 - a. The DP cannot play defense only and the FLEX cannot play offense only.
 - b. When the DP spot in the batting order comes up, either the DP, FLEX or their legal substitutes must bat or run the bases. It is the only offensive spot the DP or FLEX player may hold.
 - c. The DP can replace anyone on defense any time, any number of times while the FLEX player may replace the DP any time, any number of times.
 - d. When any of the first nine players listed on the card leaves the batting order, she has left the game, and when the FLEX player leaves the game on defense, she has left the game.

- B. For Coaches – Basic Utilization Strategies. The following are two basic strategies a coach might utilize to match the skills of the DP and FLEX players to complement one another. Further examples can be found on the NFHS Web site (www.nfhs.org).
1. Objective: to utilize a fast runner who is a weak hitter (FLEX) to run for the solid hitting DP.
 - a. Matchup: Assuming your pitcher can hit for herself, pair up a solid hitter (DP) with a player of exceptional speed but who is a weak hitter (FLEX).
 - b. Typical sequence: DP hits safely; FLEX enters to run for her; DP re-enters and hits safely; FLEX enters to run for her; sub #1 hits for DP (since the DP already used her one re-entry); FLEX enters to run for sub #1; sub #1 re-enters and hits safely; FLEX enters to run for sub #1; sub #2 hits safely; FLEX enters to run for her; and so on.
 2. Objective: List a power hitter as the FLEX player when you have a platoon of players who will be the DP's.
 - a. Matchup: Assuming your pitcher can hit for herself, pair up an average player (DP) with a good hitting, but slow runner (FLEX) who also plays defense. Also used for a good hitting pitcher (FLEX) who you do not want running the bases unnecessarily.
 - b. Typical sequence: As the spot in the batting order comes up, enter the FLEX who hits safely; re-enter the DP to run; enter the FLEX who hits safely; sub #1 enters to run (since the DP already used her one re-entry); enter the FLEX who hits safely; sub #1 re-enters to run; FLEX hits safely; sub #2 enters to run; and so on.
- C. For Umpires. The following are helpful hints in properly maintaining your lineup card (see sample lineup cards):
1. A team may use the DP/FLEX option provided it is made known at the pregame conference.
 2. The DP's name is indicated on the lineup as one of the nine hitters in the batting order.
 3. The name of the player for whom the DP is batting (FLEX) is placed in the 10th position in the lineup.

PITCHING (FP)

The NFHS Softball Rules Committee believes the pitching rule in fast pitch is in place to allow pitchers with varying degrees of pitching skills to pitch with success. The present rule allows for coaches and pitchers to determine the pitching stance to use based on the pitching strength of the pitcher.

STANCE. Pitchers must take (or simulate taking) signals from the catcher with their hands separated. The pivot foot must be on or partially on the pitcher's plate and the non-pivot foot in contact with or behind the pitcher's plate. The pitcher must bring the hands together in front of the body (one time only) for not less than one second and not more than 10 seconds before releasing the ball.

24-INCH PLATE VIOLATION. Both feet must start within or partially within the 24-inch length of the pitching plate. As the pitcher winds up and delivers the pitch, the stride foot and the pivot foot must remain in or partially within the pitching plate. Enforcement of this rule is the responsibility of the plate umpire. Failure to call this infraction gives the pitcher an added advantage not intended by the rule as it allows her to put more movement on the ball.

The NFHS Softball Rule Committee reinforces its support of the rule and encourages coaches and pitchers to take advantage of the appropriate stance based on skill level.