

Coaching Topic: Interactions with Officials

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Coaches of any sport may have occasion to have interactions with the officials of the game for a variety of reasons. In Softball, there are specific cases in which a coach can initiate an interaction, and there are definitely “proper” and “improper” ways to conduct those interactions.

In-Game Interactions

Plate Conference

Before the beginning of each game, the umpire(s) will call a home-plate conference or pre-game conference. This conference will involve the Head Coach and one or more Player Captains from each team.

Depending upon various circumstances, a few things can happen at these conferences:

- A coin toss to determine Home or Away status for each team.
- Special rules for the event (time restrictions, substitution rules, etc) may be communicated to the teams.
- Team lineup sheets are exchanged.
- Introductions and handshakes between all.



This is a great chance to establish a friendly and professional tone for the match, demonstrating sportsmanship to the players. Plate conferences should be “short and sweet”.

Appeals

There are a variety of in-game situations which may warrant an appeal made by a coach or player to an official on a play. These are covered off by the Softball Canada Rules, but there may be some modification to plays on which

an appeal can be made by individual tournament, and the rules are also quite different in the United States.



*NOTE: Before initiating an appeal, it is highly advisable to be educated on exactly where and when an appeal can be made. Failure to follow correct procedures can result in consequences that are detrimental to the team, ranging from a simple failure to address the appeal, to even allowing runs to score when they otherwise wouldn't! **Be sure before you appeal!***

Here are a variety of circumstances in which an appeal can be called for, under Canadian rules:

- A runner fails to tag up properly on a fly out before advancing.
- A runner fails to touch a base while running past it.
- A batter is batting out of order.
- A “checked swing”, to determine if the batter followed through for a strike

NOTE: It's important to note what that an Appeal is not a disagreement with an Umpire's call or ruling. It is a plea to an Umpire to make a ruling on something that occurred that they don't initiate a ruling on proactively. A disagreement with a call is considered a “protest”, which is covered a little later.

It is important to note that in the majority of these cases, it should be a defensive player that calls for the appeal. The notable exception is that a coach or defensive player may call for an appeal on a checked swing.

This is not a comprehensive list of the possible appeals, but does cover the bulk of the common ones.

Procedure for Appeals

There are two main types of appeals; Live Ball Appeals and Dead Ball Appeals.

Live Ball Appeals

Live Ball Appeals are conducted exclusively by defensive players, while the ball is still live. To properly execute a live ball appeal, a fielder must, with a live ball, tag the runner or base in question and communicate to the umpire what the infraction was and which runner committed the infraction. Such communication may be non-verbal, implicit, or assumed, so long as the intent

of the fielder is clear to the umpire. This must happen before the next pitch, or before the defensive team leaves the fair ball area of the field on the last out.

In general, coaches may not request Live Ball Appeals; they must be requested by players with the live ball.

Dead Ball Appeals

Dead Ball Appeals are much like Live Ball Appeals, except in that they can take place after requesting and having "Time" granted, rendering the play dead. This type of appeal is considered safer, in that there is much less chance for confusion.

In general, Dead Ball Appeals may be requested by a defensive player, or by a coach who has requested "Time" and left the dugout.

Softball Canada rules allow for nearly all appeals to be handled as Dead Ball Appeals. However, individual events (particularly out of country) may not allow for this. It is important to review the rules applicable to the event you are playing in before initiating appeals.

For the purpose of this document, we'll focus on Dead Ball Appeals.

How to Request

First off, it's important to note the timing requirements. In general, appeals must be made:

- A. Before the next pitch or play starts and/or,
- B. Before the fielding team leaves the fair ball area of the playing field toward their dugout.

If there is a reason to appeal, a defensive player or the coach can request "Time" after the play has ended and wait for it to be granted, which will render the ball dead. If the coach has requested "Time" in order to make an appeal, they must leave the dugout to speak with the appropriate umpire, which is generally the one closest to the play being appealed.

The player or coach should articulate, in a calm manner, what the believed infraction was and where on the field.

The umpire will then rule, either granting the appeal or reject it. Depending on the outcome, they will issue Outs, Runs, or place runners on bases accordingly.

Protests

It's worth noting a few things that are not available for appeal. These are considered protests. They are asking an Umpire to reverse or alter a previous ruling, usually due to new or overlooked information.

The rulebook defines protests as being valid when they involve "rule interpretation". If an umpire is shown to have misinterpreted or misapplied the rules, they should grant the protest. If not, the play stands.

While there are a wide variety of cases that might lead to a protest, here are some of the most common.

- Application of Infield Fly Rule
- Application of Illegal Pitch Rules
- Miscount of Balls, Strikes, Outs.
- Incorrectly called "Time"

NOTE: It is important to note that protests are not deemed valid if they about an umpire's "judgement". That is why it is useless to protest balls and strikes, as well as foul/fair calls, and even safe/out calls made on plays in the field. Those calls are made strictly upon an Umpire's judgement, and are not subject to protest.

As with Appeals, Protests must occur:

- A. Before the next pitch or play starts and/or,
- B. Before the fielding team leaves the fair ball area of the playing field toward their dugout.

For a variety of appeal and protest situations that can occur in a game, along with how they should be ruled on, an excellent resource is the [Softball Canada Umpire Casebook](#), which is free to download.



Lineup Changes / Substitutions



The home plate umpire must be informed any time there is a substitution. While the rules surrounding substitutions will not be addressed here, it is important to note that strictly defensive changes (ie - First Base and Second Base switch defensive positions) are not

substitutions and may be done at the coach's discretion.

When a substitution takes place, it must happen during a dead ball situation; either during "Time" or at a half-inning.

The head plate umpire must be informed of the substitution, and the information must also be provided to the official scorekeeper(s).

Handshake Line

After a game ends, it is considered good sportsmanship to have each team, including all players and staff, line up and shake hands, both with each other and with the umpires. This is a demonstration of how good sportsmanship works to the athletes, and shows respect for all people involved with the game.

Tone and Conduct

It is very important to remember that our association is a Minor Sports Association. There are a variety of key take-aways that we can bring out of this simple fact.

Athletes

Our athletes are children. This is a developmental environment for them. They are looking, whether they acknowledge it or not, at the adults to provide guidance on how to behave and perform.

Umpires

We have umpires, particularly at the younger age divisions, that may be somewhat inexperienced. Some of them are children themselves.

Umpires, regardless of their level of experience or age, are tasked with performing a difficult task. They are also absolutely critical to being able to have games for the athletes to play in. They are inherently deserving of respect as the Officials of the game.

Coaches

Coaches are tasked with representing their team, as well as guiding them. They need to do many things, including teaching the players how best to play the game, make decisions on player deployment and strategies, and still set a good example for the young athletes.

The coaches should always strive to maintain a positive and professional attitude during all interactions with umpires and other officials.

The kids are watching!

The Code of Conduct

The [Softball Alberta Coach's Code of Conduct](#) has a few things to say about Coach interactions with Umpires, including:

- I will respect the official's decisions and communicate with them in an appropriate manner and I will encourage my players to do the same.
- I will encourage all players to play by the rules and to resolve conflicts without resorting to hostility or violence.
- I will never ridicule or yell at the players, coaches or officials for making a mistake.
- I will never question the official's judgment or honesty in public.
- I will support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from sporting activities.
- I will not use bad language, nor will I harass athletes, coaches, officials or other spectators.
- I will be knowledgeable of the league rules and regulations and teach these rules to the players on my team.
- I will encourage my players to respect the rights of other players, coaches, fans & officials.

In addition, the Medicine Hat Minor Softball Association asks their coaches to sign their understanding of their own [Coaching Code of Ethics](#), which includes the following statement.

The coach must accept the role of officials in providing judgment to ensure that competitions are conducted fairly and according to the established rules.



Lastly, a really good resource for helping to evaluate the impact that you as a coach might be having upon your players is this handy [Positive Coaching Checklist](#) from Respect in Sport.

The key item here in regards to officials is *"I encourage players to treat the opposition and officials with respect and fairness"*.

The key thing to remember is that everyone on the field has a job to do, and is trying to do it well. That includes the players, the coaches, and the officials of the game.