



NCAA Baseball Interpretation
Clarification of Obstruction/Collision Rule/Plays at the Plate
Rules 2-55, 8-7
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In recent years, baseball at all levels has been concerned with eliminating unnecessary collisions between runners and fielders, especially those involving plays at the plate. Language was added to the playing rules two years ago to specifically address these plays and, as a result, the frequency and the severity of the contact in these plays have been reduced. These plays are not easy ones for umpires to judge as there are several factors that impact the call. Over the past three seasons, these rules have been reviewed and several guidelines have been used in our training materials to assist college umpires (and now video replay reviewers) to rule on these plays per NCAA interpretation.

Rule 2-55 states the **definition of obstruction** as “the act of a fielder who, while not in possession of or in the **act of fielding** the ball, impedes the progress of any runner.” **Rule 2-55 Note 4** of this rule specifies that on a pickoff play at any base, the defensive player must clearly have possession of the ball before blocking the base, but on any other play such as a play at the plate, the fielder can either have possession of the ball or be in the act of fielding it.

Rule 8-7-c states “unless the catcher is in possession of the ball, the catcher cannot block the pathway of the runner as he is **attempting to score**... Notwithstanding the above, it shall not be considered a violation if the catcher blocks the pathway of the runner in a legitimate attempt to field the throw.”

The restrictions on the position of the catcher begin when a runner is “attempting to score”. This has been defined in our training as the runner’s last few steps before touching home plate or once he reaches the dirt circle surrounding home plate. Once the runner reaches this point, the catcher cannot hinder or impede the runner’s progress by being in the runner’s pathway to the plate unless he has possession of the ball or is in the act of fielding.

The “act of fielding” in **Rule 8-7-c** is defined as a “legitimate attempt to field the throw,” providing the example of “in reaction to the direction, trajectory or the hop of the incoming throw, or in reaction to a throw that originates from the pitcher or drawn-in infielder.” As described in recent training videos, a throw that is within the last 60 feet toward the plate (the distance between home plate and the pitching rubber) would be a factor in determining if the catcher is in the act of fielding. **Rule 2-55 Notes 1 and 6** further defines the act of fielding as “If the fielder is about to receive a thrown ball and the ball is in flight directly toward and near enough to the fielder so he must occupy his position to receive the throw”. To summarize, to be in the act of fielding, the fielder must be in a position where a legitimate attempt will allow him to receive a nearby throw that is coming directly toward him. As stated in **Rule 2-55 Note 6**, “It is entirely up to the judgment of the umpire as to whether the fielder is in the act of fielding a ball.”

To rule on a play at the plate, the umpire needs to take a “mental snapshot” to record the relative positions of the runner, the catcher (fielder), and the throw.

1. Is the runner attempting to score (inside the dirt circle around the plate or within the last few steps in his approach to the plate)?
 - a. If the answer is “no”, the catcher can be standing anywhere he chooses. However, a good practice would be for the catcher to always take an initial position not in the baseline until he needs to be there to make a play.
 - b. If the answer is “yes”, look at the position of the catcher and the throw.
2. Is the catcher in the pathway of the runner?
 - a. If the answer is “yes” and a runner is attempting to score, he needs to have possession of the ball or be in the act of fielding the throw.
 - b. If the catcher is doing neither of these and he impedes the progress of the runner, it is obstruction.
3. What is the position of the throw to the plate?
 - a. If the ball is in flight directly toward and near enough to the fielder (within 60 feet) that the catcher can make a legitimate effort to field the throw, he is in the act of fielding and can be blocking the runner’s pathway.
 - b. If the position of the ball is not within these limits and the catcher impedes the runner’s progress, it is obstruction.

Hopefully this document will further the understanding of the factors that go into judging whether there is obstruction on a play at the plate. There are also training videos available on the NCAA baseball central hub on ArbiterSports. Have a great season!

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