

Umpire's Corner: Can it be Caught for an Out?

By Donna McGuire
Softball News Report

During the most recent Senior Softball USA Winter Worlds, an umpire on break recounted a situation he experienced as a player during the World Championships in Las Vegas.

Two directors and an umpire listened – then gave three different answers on what constituted the correct call.

If directors and umpires cannot agree, you can bet the play is an unusual one.

Here it is:

Runners were on first and third bases with one out. The third baseman was playing behind the baseline when the batter hit a rocket toward third. The fair ball smacked the runner in the left shoulder while he retained contact with the base. He fell backward, off the base, writhing in pain. The ball ricocheted skyward toward the shortstop, who caught it. The ball still had not hit the dirt. The shortstop sprinted toward the still-down runner and tagged him before he got back to the base. The other runners advanced safely.

What do you have?

One person listening to the story said: Out on the catch. Out on the tagged runner. Inning over.

The second listener disagreed. He said: No catch. The tagged runner is out. The inning continues with two outs and runners at first and second.

The third listener shook her head.

She disagreed with both. Her rationale: Because the

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fair batted ball hit the runner while he had contact with the base, and because the third baseman was playing behind the runner, the umpire should have called “Dead ball,” and awarded the batter-runner first base. The runner on first should have been awarded second because he was forced to move up. The injured runner at third should have been placed back on third base. Bases loaded. Still one out.

Yep. We have a winner. That is correct.

The odd play also raises other fun-to-think-about “what if” questions.

For example, what if a batted line drive deflects in flight off a pitcher’s glove and hits a runner going between second and third bases – and then the shortstop catches the ball without it hitting the ground?

Take your time. Think it through. What is the call?

First, the umpire must decide whether the runner intentionally interfered with the deflected batted ball. If the umpire believes the contact was intentional, he should call interference. The runner would be out, the batter-runner would be awarded first base.

If the umpire does not believe the runner intentionally interfered, the ball would remain live and the play would continue.

OK. So, if no interference happened, should the umpire call the batter-runner out

because the shortstop caught the ball before it contacted the ground?

Answer: No.

Do you know why?

A ball deflected off the pitcher remains live. If it had deflected off the pitcher and been caught by a defender before hitting the ground, it would be a legal catch and an out.

But in this case, the deflected ball hit a runner. That is the same as if the ball had hit the ground, a base, the fence – or even a base umpire. The ball no longer can be caught for an out in those situations. On the other hand, if a ball deflects off a defender, it still can be caught for an out before it hits the ground or a fence, or a runner, or an umpire.

Balls caught after

deflections do happen. But usually not after the ball hit a runner. Those are rare.

Now, at least, you know what the correct call should be.

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Heard From The Dugout

"Who's on
first?"

Abbott and Costello
Famed American
Comedy Duo

