

## *Obstruction and Interference*

**Obstruction and interference can be confusing when deciding and explaining a call. Remember – defense obstructs, offense interferes.**

<b>Obstruction</b>	<b>Interference</b>
<p>When a fielder, without possession of the ball, impedes the progress of a runner</p> <p>Always done by the defense (fielders)</p>	<p>(Most often) when a runner interferes with a fielder attempting to make a play</p> <p>Almost always done by the offense (team at bat)</p>
<p>Typical examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fielder standing in front of a bag (or in the base path) awaiting a thrown ball</li> <li>- Fielder standing in the base path not paying attention</li> <li>- Fielder standing in the base path of a runner attempting to steal a base after a pitch</li> <li>- A run down (aka “pickle”) where a fielder is in the base path waiting on a thrown ball</li> </ul>	<p>Typical examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Runner collides with a fielder making a play on a batted ball</li> <li>- Runner is hit by a batted ball</li> <li>- Runner obscures the fielder’s vision while attempting to field a batted ground ball</li> </ul>
<p>When it occurs, play stops (umpire calls time) depending on the type of obstruction (below)</p> <p>Generally, the runner is awarded base(s)</p> <p>Other runners typically advance to the base they were approaching at the time of the obstruction</p>	<p>When it occurs, play always stops (umpire calls time) at the time of the interference</p> <p>The runner is called out</p> <p>All other runners typically return to the last base touched prior to the interference</p>

There are two types of obstruction that determine if and when the umpire stops play

- Type A: play is being made on the obstructed runner. Play stops immediately (umpire calls time) and a dead ball results.

- Type B: play is not being made on the obstructed runner. Play continues and the umpire may call time later depending on the play outcome.

**Knowing who has the "right of way" will help you decide between an obstruction or interference call.**

1. **On a batted ball:** the fielder has the right to the ball including within the base path.

- If a runner impacted a fielder's attempt to make a play on the ball, the ruling is interference on the runner.

- Only one fielder is protected against interference (umpire judgement).

- If a fielder makes an error on the play, he is still protected by the interference rule if he attempts to get a loose ball that is within a "step and a reach".

2. **On a thrown ball:** the runner has the right to the base including along the base path.

- If a runner's path to a base was altered, for example if he slowed down or ran around a fielder (without possession of the ball), the ruling is obstruction on the fielder.

3. **If a fielder has possession of the ball** - he can stand wherever he wants without risk of being called for obstruction.

## **Obstruction A and B**

How do I enforce the obstruction rule?

There are two types of obstruction that determine if and when the umpire stops play. Otherwise, how you enforce the ruling and make your call are nearly the same.

How do I spot obstruction?

**It's not obstruction until you see it**

- Fielders without the ball often stand on a base or in the base path. Doing so does not make them guilty of obstruction. They're not obstructing unless a runner's advance or path is altered. Things to look for:

Did the runner stop?

Did the runner step to the side?

Did the runner slow down or hesitate?

Did the runner slide when he didn't need to?

- And remember, a fielder with the ball may stand anywhere to make a play and thus would not be guilty of obstruction.



**How do I enforce Obstruction A? – when the play is being made on the obstructed runner.**

To enforce Obstruction A, immediately call time and direct runners to their bases

**Enforcement of Obstruction A**

1. Obstruction A occurs when the play in process is being made on the obstructed runner. Example: a runner veers to the side or slows down to reach second base because the fielder is in the base path (waiting for a thrown ball).
2. At the moment the runner's path is altered, immediately call time and award the base to the runner. The runner is made safe by the ruling whether he was tagged or not prior to reaching the base.
3. Award one or more bases to runners based on where you believe they would have reached safely had the obstruction not occurred. Most often it is one base beyond the last base touched. Example: award home to a runner that was between third base and home plate at the time of the obstruction.

**Make Your Call**

1. Shout your call loudly so everyone understands the ruling. Some umpires will also point to the fielder with a fist. With multiple runners, point at each and instruct them where to go.
2. Only the obstructed runner in the field of play  
"Time!" "That's obstruction – runner's safe!"
3. Multiple runners  
"Time!" "That's obstruction – runner's safe at second!" "You – go home"! Run scores!" You – first base!"



**How do I enforce Obstruction B? - when the play is not being made on the obstructed runner.**

To enforce Obstruction B, wait for the final play outcome before deciding on a call

**Enforcement**

1. Obstruction B occurs when no play is currently being made on the obstructed runner. Example: the first baseman, standing on first base, causes a runner to slow down as he rounds first on his way to a double.
2. Observe the obstruction and allow the play to continue. Decide at that time what base you believe the runner is likely to reach, had it not been for the obstruction. This is referred to as "protecting the runner" to a base. Usually it's one base ahead of the obstruction.
3. When all play stops, enforcement depends on the final play outcome.

If the runner was tagged out at the base he was protected to ...	Call "time" and award the base to the runner. The runner is safe.
If the runner was safe at the base he was protected to ...	Don't do anything (no time out or obstruction call). Let the play stand. The runner remains safe.
If the runner advances beyond the protected base ...	Runner advances at his own risk. Let the play proceed. The obstruction ruling is no longer in effect.

4. In most cases, additional runners remain on the bases they reached when the play ended. But any outs on other (non-obstructed) runners are enforced.

5. If (in the unusual case) more than one extra base is awarded to the obstructed runner, than all other runners advance accordingly. Example: a batter-runner was on his way to an easy triple but was tagged out at second after having run into a fielder and falling down. A slower runner who made it to third on the play would be advanced to home because you awarded third base to the obstructed runner.

### **Make Your Call**

1. The Obstruction B call is similar to Obstruction A but requires a bit more explanation by the umpire.
2. Only the obstructed runner in the field of play; "Time!" "I've got obstruction at first base." "Runner's safe at second."
3. No need to give directions to other runners. They stay at the base they reached (except in the example above of an obstructed runner that is awarded more than one base).

### **Runner Interference**

#### **How do I manage interference violations?**

The most common type of interference is by base runners that impede or hinder a fielder's attempt at making a play.

How do I enforce interference?

Where do I place the batter-runner?

What's the call after a batted ball gets by the fielder?

**To enforce interference, immediately call time and declare the runner out. Direct other runners back to the bases they last touched.**



### **Enforcement**

- When a runner (offense) interferes with a fielder's (defense) attempt to make a play, the runner is immediately called out. Call time at the moment you spot the interference, creating a dead ball situation that stops all further play.

- Most often, you'll return all other runners to the last base they touched prior to the interference. No run is allowed to score after an interference play.

- Some interference violations are not so obvious and require umpire judgment.

Example: a runner passes in front of a fielder who fumbles a ground ball. If you believe the runner didn't cause the error, let the play stand. If the runner made a deliberate attempt to avoid contact with the ball or fielder, then you have an even stronger case for not calling interference.

### **Make Your Call**

1. Shout your call loudly so everyone understands the ruling. With multiple runners, point at each and instruct them where to go.

2. Only the interfering runner in the field of play  
"Time!" "She's out!" "Interference!"

3. Multiple runners

"Time!" "That's interference – runner's out!" "You – back to second"! You – back to third"! Scorekeeper, don't score the run!"

### **A batter-runner does not return to home plate after an interference violation by another runner**

- Usually all runners return to the last base touched prior to the interference. An exception is when the batter hits the ball into play. A good rule of thumb: "A batter-runner (BR) is not penalized for interference by other base runners". A BR acquires the base that the umpire believes he would have reached if not for the interference.

- Award 1st base to the batter-runner (BR) if he hit the ball into play but did not reach first base at the time of the interference. Any other runners are forced to advance to the next base if needed.

Example: a runner at first (R1) was between 1st and 2nd at the time of interference by another runner. R1 is placed on 2nd base in order to award 1st base to BR.

### **There is no interference on the runner if, after the first attempt by a fielder, no other fielder has an opportunity to make a play**

- If a batted ball goes through or by a fielder (including the pitcher), a runner is not at risk for interference unless another defender has a chance to make a play on the ball.

Example: a shortstop, playing up in the base path, allows a ground ball to slip through his glove which then hits a runner, running in the base path behind him. The runner is not called out for interference and play continues.

- Only one fielder is deemed by the umpire to have a play on the ball at any moment. If a second fielder had a reasonable chance to make a play after the error in the example above, you would call the runner out on interference.

- A secondary fielder that is chasing a ball from a distance would not be considered as having a "reasonable chance" to make a play and thus he would not be protected against interference by the runner. The umpire will decide what is a "reasonable chance" based on skill level for that age and the degree of difficulty.

## **Obstruction and Interference**

### **How do I Rule on Collisions?**

Collisions (aka "train wrecks") between a runner and fielder are among the most difficult plays to rule on because player accountability can change in a split second. Sometimes a collision results in "nuthin" (no call).

What is "nuthin"?

What are the most common types of collisions that result in nuthin'?

How do I make my call and manage a collision play?

Dispelling a common myth – does a runner have to slide to avoid contact?

### **Timing is critical in determining whether a collision results in obstruction, interference or "nuthin"**

- Nuthin' means that no-call is made and play continues. A typical example is a runner who collides with a fielder that is reaching to catch a ball. These are tricky calls because accountability between the fielder and runner changes in a split second

- When you anticipate a close play between a runner and fielder, follow this sequence once the ball is thrown:

Is the fielder providing access to the base path and base? If so, likely no obstruction to call.  
Once the fielder has the ball, did the runner make contact? If so, he's at risk of runner interference.

### **When legally positioned players, through no fault of their own, are drawn into a collision, you've got nuthin'**

- First baseman suddenly reaches into the base path to catch a poor throw from an infielder, colliding with the batter-runner.

- Catcher reaches into the base path to catch a ball from the outfield, resulting in a collision with the runner at home plate.

- First baseman fields batted ball, attempts to outrun the batter-runner to the bag for a force out, resulting in a collision at first base.

### **Make your call loudly and use the safe signal to indicate a no-call (nuthin')**

1. Shout loudly, "I got nuthin!" and make a safe signal with your arms to indicate a no-call and for play to continue.

2. Even though you might have a nasty collision, don't call time until the entire play ends. Only stop play ("Time!") if you feel that an injured player is at further risk of harm during the remainder of the play.
3. The nuthin' ruling assumes that the runner was in his expected base path at the time of the collision and contact was unintentional. Otherwise, you have runner interference. It also assumes that no obstruction on the runner (e.g. hesitated, slowed down, ran to the side) was caused by the fielder prior to the collision.

**A runner must either slide or attempt to get around a fielder who has the ball AND is waiting to make the tag**

- In the above scenario, call the runner out for interference if he doesn't slide or attempt to get around the fielder, whether the runner made contact or not. The intent of this rule is safety (to prevent collisions) and to prevent a runner from trying to knock the ball loose from the fielder.

- The runner does not by rule have to slide to avoid contact (a common myth).

He has four options:

- 1) slide;
- 2) get around the fielder like move to the side or even jump over;
- 3) retreat;
- 4) "surrender".

- The runner need only attempt to avoid contact. A young player, who executes a poor slide and ends up stumbling into the fielder, would not be called out for interference.

- But what if the fielder (who just caught the ball) was turned away from the oncoming runner at the time of the collision? Then the call is nuthin', because the fielder was not deemed as being ready to make the tag!

- The nuthin' call assumes that the runner's contact was unintentional; otherwise, the runner is always out (and ejected for unsportsmanlike conduct).

- For close plays, especially at home plate, a catcher with the ball and ready to make the tag may "block the plate" with any part of his body.

Obstruction and Interference

What are some good tips for beginners?

Understanding how to rule on the many possibilities is an acquired skill learned in the heat of battle. In the meantime, here are two tips that will help you be better prepared and deal with uncertainty.

What can I do to anticipate violations?

What should I do if I'm unsure about the right call?

**Watch fielders' positioning before the next pitch to anticipate potential violations**

- Obstruction and interference are easier to see and call when you anticipate a violation before it happens. As the pitcher prepares to throw the next pitch, look at where the fielders are standing.

- If a fielder is standing in the base path, especially when close to a base occupied by a runner, the chance of runner interference or fielder obstruction on a batted ball is high. The chance of fielder obstruction on an attempted steal and throw from the catcher is high.

**Examples:**

<b>The Play</b>	<b>Your Call</b>
Runner from first base (R1) runs into the first baseman who attempted to make a play on a batted ball to his area of the field.	R1 out for interference.
R1 is forced to go around the first baseman on a batted ball to the shortstop and in so doing, is late (and out) at 2nd base.	R1 safe on the obstruction at first base.
R1 has to run around the first baseman on an attempted steal.	R1 safe on obstruction if the catcher threw him out at second.

- Younger players will often repeat the same positioning mistakes during a game until they learn from having a penalty called on them. Look for other fielder tendencies like standing in front of or on the bases for potential obstruction.

**Dealing with uncertainty – let your crew decide on the call or “let it go”**

- If you think a violation of some sort occurred but are unsure about what call to make, take one of two options:

1) Let all play finish and when the runners have settled and the ball is under control by an infielder, call “Time!” Meet with your umpire crew to decide what (if any), call to make.

- This is not ideal with dead ball violations (obstruction A and interference) because it’s harder to recall who was where at the time of the violation. But much better than killing a play in process if you’re not sure (and later wrong!)

2) Wait a moment after the play ends. If nobody complains or says anything, then it was either not of much consequence or completely missed. In that case, don’t say or do anything and just “let it go”.

- Another opportunity when you’re unsure: meet with your umpire crew to decide where to place runners after a violation.