

## SRI BULLETIN #1 2024

UMPIRES;

While this is my first *official* SRI Bulletin, as the Deputy SRI, I have had my share of input on these. 2024 is no different in that the ***Points of Emphasis*** head the list of topics. At the top of the POE list is;

### **PACE OF PLAY**

We have all seen the steps recently taken and the positive impact on game times and overall pace-of-play, at both the MLB and NCAA levels of baseball. The NFHS recognizes the same issues occur at the high school level and we need to be aware of – and use – the tools at our disposal to maintain a good pace of play.

Warm-up pitches/throws between innings: The defensive team has **60-seconds**, starting with the last out of the previous inning, to complete five (5) warm up throws. Though we don't have a visible clock to work with, we need to develop a solid internal clock to gauge the one-minute mark.

Remember to stay engaged with the pitcher and catcher, encouraging them to get in their throws. But don't be afraid to step in and stop any further throws when they exceed their allotted time! Good preventive officiating could include a verbal reminder on a first offense such as telling the catcher, "You guys were a bit long that half-inning. Pick up the pace next time, or I'll have to cut it short".

### **20-SECOND LIMIT BETWEEN PITCHES/PLAYS**

This rule has been in place since the 1970s; before wristband pitch calling or the many other things that have slowed the game to a snail's pace at times. If the game is proceeding at a good pace of play, the pitcher is ready to pitch and the batter is in the box ready to hit, this rule is superfluous. However, if those things are not happening and the pitcher is exceeding his allowed time, and a verbal nudge to the catcher to get the pitcher throwing more promptly doesn't work, then this rule is your friend.

Once again, prudently applying the rule will result in the game actually picking up pace, rather than creating an argument, contention, and even further slowing down the contest. If you need to call it, Rule 6.2.2c allows a ball to be awarded to the batter for each violation.

### **BATTER STEPPING OUT OF THE BOX**

In a bygone era, long before the myriad adjustments to batting gloves, elbow guards, and shin/instep protection were commonplace, the batter actually stayed in the box, ready to hit! While we have to contend with those things in today's game, we don't have to, nor should we let it, slow the game unnecessarily. Game situations can dictate the batter getting a sign, etc. but there are only a handful of specific times the batter can legally leave the batter's box. If the batter is repeatedly stepping out and/or delaying the game, strongly encourage them to, "Get back in the box!" and gesture for them to step in so it is clearly communicated to all watching. If the batter is not ready within 20-seconds, a strike shall be called on the batter (Rule 7.3.1).

## **EXCESSIVE PLAYER CONFERENCES**

We've all had those games/teams where the defense has a five-person mound huddle after every out. If it doesn't impact the game negatively, it's OK. But when it does, we have to step up and put a stop to it. Being aware of and engaged with this behavior will ensure it doesn't get out of hand.

## **UMPIRE TIME MANAGEMENT**

While it is fair to say that 98% of game delay issues are created by the players and/or coaches, there is a small percentage that is actually our fault as umpires. There is nothing we can do about the skill level of the players, and the lower the skill set, the longer the game. However, there are areas where we can have an impact, such as;

1. Being consistent in applying the aforementioned Pace-of-Play tools
2. Encouraging the players to hustle and move with purpose and alacrity
3. Expediting conferences
4. Ensuring the batter is in the box and ready to hit
5. Enforcing the 60-second between innings limit

## **TIME LIMIT – Sub Varsity**

Starting in some areas last season and being codified statewide for 2024, all sub-varsity baseball games will operate under the following; "No new inning after 2:15 of elapsed time". Please note this is NOT a drop-dead cutoff. We all want the players to have opportunities to play and learn the game. However, no one; players, coaches, or parents, wants a 3-hour baseball game. Remember to make this statement at the plate talk; "Coach, this game has a time-limit. No new inning after 2:15". It is not a question, nor a debate, simply a clarification.

Let's all have a GREAT 2024 season! I look forward to seeing you at the yard.

Mark Coursey  
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