

2026 Baseball Rules Points of Emphasis & Rules Changes

Rules Changes Summary

- 1-2-9, 2-5-1h, 2-16-1h, 8-2-1, 8-2-2(a)1-7, 8-2-7, 8-4-1g(1)** – Modified that the double first base will be mandatory effective January 1, 2027, and associated rule changes.
- 1-4-4** – Clarified what is allowed on a school’s official baseball uniform.
- 1-6-3** – Clarified what is not allowed to be worn by a player to record or transmit audio or video feeds.
- 2-10-3** – Clarified the definition of a player-to-player defensive meeting.
- 3-4-6** – Clarified the difference from a player-to-player meeting and a charged conference.

2026 Points of Emphasis

The NFHS Baseball Rules Committee and the NFHS Board of Directors believes there are areas of the game of interscholastic baseball that need to be addressed and given special attention. These areas of concern are often cyclical, some areas need more attention than others, and that is why they might appear in the rules book for consecutive editions. These concerns are identified as “Points of Emphasis.” For the 2026 high school baseball season, attention is being called to: Discipline (of Players and Coaches), Sportsmanship (Bench Jockeying), Proper Pitching Positions, and Running Lane Awareness. When a topic is included in the Points of Emphasis, these topics are important enough to reinforce throughout the academic year because they are not being given the proper attention.

- **Discipline**

In the game of baseball, umpires serve as impartial authorities whose primary role is to ensure that the contest is conducted fairly, safely, and within the framework of established NFHS rules. Respecting their decisions is foundational to the integrity of the sport and models appropriate behavior. When coaches and players accept umpire rulings—whether or not they agree—it promotes sportsmanship, discipline, and respect for the game. It also helps maintain focus, keeps the pace of play steady, and fosters a positive environment for all participants, including opponents and spectators. Disputing or showing visible dissent toward an umpire’s decision undermines their authority and disrupts the game. More importantly, it sets a poor example for younger players and fans. Such behavior, if left unchecked, can escalate tensions and compromise the spirit of competition.

Any unsportsmanlike conduct, arguing, or disrespect directed toward umpires will result in disciplinary action, which may include warnings, restriction to the bench, or ejection from the game found in NFHS Baseball Rule 3 (3-3 Articles 1-4) and Rule 10 (10-2-3). These penalties are not

punitive in nature—they are protective of the values that define high school sports: respect, integrity, and personal responsibility. Respect for officials isn't just a rule—it's a reflection of the maturity, leadership, and character we hope to instill in all participants through educational athletics.

- **Sportsmanship (Bench Jockeying and Props)**

High school baseball exists within the framework of education-based athletics, where the primary goals extend beyond competition to include character development, sportsmanship, and mutual respect. With that in mind, bench jockeying has no place in the high school game. Bench jockeying—defined as negative verbal comments, taunting, or attempts to distract, intimidate, or embarrass opponents or officials from the dugout—violates the standards of conduct expected in interscholastic competition. It detracts from the integrity of the sport and undermines the core values of respect and self-control that high school sports are intended to teach. More importantly, bench jockeying often escalates tensions, provokes retaliation, and leads to unsportsmanlike behavior that can tarnish the contest and damage the experience for players, coaches, umpires, and spectators alike. High school athletes are still learning how to carry themselves with dignity and class under pressure. Allowing or ignoring bench jockeying sends the wrong message. By rule, sportsmanship (bench jockeying) is prohibited and will result in warnings, restrictions, or ejections as deemed appropriate by the umpire. Enforcement of this rule is not about silencing enthusiasm—it is about upholding the spirit of fair play and modeling appropriate conduct for students, schools, and communities.

Like Bench Decorum, there is no logical purpose to have props at an education based athletic event. They are not enhancing the educational value of the contest. In fact, they deter from any valuable lesson gained from competing. Unlike the collegiate and professional models, the use of props or any items to demean or embarrass one's opponent is contrary to the reason the NFHS writes playing rules for high school age and skilled students.

The dugout should be a place of encouragement and unity, not derision and distraction. Let the game be decided by skill, preparation, and respect—not by unnecessary noise and antics.

- **Proper Pitching Positions**

The premise of the pitching positions is very basic and a violation is enforceable regardless if there is a runner on or not on base. Pitching positions have evolved over the years to stay current with existing teaching styles and the increasing skill levels of high school age students. It is one of the most talked about and modified rules in the history of NFHS rules writing. We should always be cautious and concerned that the reasons to change the rule is never associated to the whims or trends of other levels of baseball. Pitchers are required to use one of two positions: the wind-up or the set. It is important that umpires, coaches, and players know what position the pitcher is using so they know which part of Rule 6 is in play. The position of the pivot foot determines which of the pitching

positions is being used. In the wind-up position, the pitcher's pivot foot is in contact with the pitcher's plate and is not parallel to it. They may only deliver a pitch or step backward off the pitcher's plate with the pivot first. In the set position, the pivot foot is in contact with or directly in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate.

- **Running Lane Awareness**

Enforcing the running lane rule (NFHS Rule 8-4-1g) is vital for player safety, fairness, and the educational goals of high school baseball. The batter-runner must use the designated lane in foul territory during a play at first base.

1. Safety – The lane prevents collisions and protects both the runner and the fielder.
2. Fair Play – Staying in the lane avoids unfair interference with defensive plays.
3. Consistency – Regular enforcement promotes accountability and discourages rule violations.
4. Education – Teaching proper lane use reinforces respect for the rules and the game.

Violations result in interference, with the batter-runner out and runners returned. This rule is more than a technicality—it's essential to a safe, fair, and respectful game.

2026 Rules changes

Rule 1

Section 2

ART. 9 . . . Effective January 1, 2027, the double first base will be required. The double first base shall be a white base and a contrasting solid color. The white portion of the base is located in fair territory and the colored base shall be located in foul territory. The double first base is split by the first base foul line. They shall be installed with no space between the two portions of the double first base. Both double first bases (white and colored), second and third bases shall be white bags, 15 inches square and 2 to 5 inches in thickness, and made of canvas filled with a soft material, or molded rubber or synthetic material, and shall be securely attached to the ground or an anchor system as in Diagram 2. Bases may have tapered edges and/or be designed to disengage from their anchor systems.

Rule 1

Section 4

ART. 4 . . . The school's official uniform (including uniform pants, jersey, visible undergarments, socks, stockings, caps and headwear) may bear only a visible single manufacturer's logo (partial or whole) or trademark. A manufacturer's logo/trademark shall not exceed 2¼ square inches with no dimension exceeding 2¼ inches. No more than one manufacturer's logo/trademark or reference

shall be permitted on the outside of each item. (The same restriction shall apply to either the manufacturer's logo/trademark or reference.) Effective, January 1, 2027, a school's name, school's nickname, school's logo, school's mascot, and/or the player's name are permitted on the uniform top and/or pants. One American flag 2 inches x 3 inches may be worn or occupy space on each item of uniform apparel.

Rule 1

Section 5

ART. 3 . . . The catcher shall wear, in addition to a head protector, a mask with a throat protector, body/chest protector that has been certified by SEI to meet the NOCSAE standard at the time of manufacture, protective cup (male only), and baseball protective shin guards. The SEI/NOCSAE mark is required on all body/chest protectors that has been certified by SEI and meets the NOCSAE standard at the time of manufacture that will be used in high school competition. Please see the accompanying mark.

Rule 2

Section 6

ART. 3 . . . No player shall wear any audio (microphone) or video (camera) device during the game.

PENALTY: The umpire shall issue a team warning to the coach of the team involved and the next offender(s) of that team will be ejected along with the head coach.

Rule 2

Section 10 CONFERENCES/MEETINGS

ART. 3 . . . A player-to-player defensive meeting includes two or more defensive players (3-4-6).

Rule 3

Section 1

ART 4

- a. The designated hitter may be a 10th starter hitting for any one of the nine starting defensive players. If a pinch hitter or pinch runner for the designated hitter is used, that player becomes the new designated hitter. If the designated hitter (DH) is used in this manner, the role of the DH is terminated for the remainder of the game when:

Rule 3

SECTION 4 CHARGED CONFERENCES/DEFENSIVE PLAYER MEETINGS

ART. 6 . . . Each team, when on defense, may be granted not more than one player-to-player meeting during an inning to permit players to confer with defensive personnel. The umpire shall deny any subsequent player-to-player defensive team requests for meetings for that half-inning.