

Understanding the ASA/NFHS DP / Flex Rule

Starting Lineup

With DP/Flex, you have 10 starters, not 9. Both the DP and the Flex are starting players. The DP/Flex must be indicated on the starting lineup. Once the starting lineup has been given to the umpire, these positions cannot be added.

Batting Order / Substitutes

As with any lineup, a substitute bats where the player she replaced was batting.

DP/Flex are joined at the hip with respect to the batting order. If both players are in the game, the Flex has number 10 in the batting order (i.e. she does not bat). The only place in the batting order that either DP or the Flex can bat is the place the DP occupied at the beginning of the game.

In a normal substitution, one player leaves the game and one player enters the game. However, swapping the DP/Flex for each other is a "half substitution" - that is, only one member of the pair officially leaves the game or officially re-enters the game.

For example, if the DP comes in on defense for the Flex, the Flex has left the game (the lineup goes from 10 to 9 players). If the Flex re-enters on defense (which she can, 1 time), the DP returns to offense only and the lineup goes back to 10 players. This move has not affected the DP's starter / substitution / re-entry status in any way.

Let's take the reverse example: If the Flex comes in on offense for the DP, she is replacing the DP in the batting order (the lineup goes from 10 to 9). In this case, the DP is removed from the game, and the substitute re-entry rules apply to the DP. If the DP re-enters, she will re-assume her original position in the batting order, and the lineup will go from 9 to 10, and the DP will have used up her re-entry rights. The Flex will return to playing defense only. This move has not affected the Flex's starter / substitution / re-entry status in any way.

Either the DP or the Flex can be substituted for in the usual ways by other players, but the substitute takes on the position of the DP or Flex (depending on who she is substituting for).

Defensive Position Swaps Involving the DP and Flex

As with any lineup, defensive position swaps are not substitutions.

The DP starts at the defensive position of "F10"¹ - benchwarmer. This means you can swap the DP with any player other than the Flex on defense and no one has left the game; it is not a substitution.

The player removed from defense continues to bat in her normal place in the batting order.

The Flex can be moved from her starting defensive position to any other defensive position (except for "F10" - benchwarmer), and she remains the Flex, and it is not a substitution.

Playing Shorthanded with DP/Flex

If you start with DP/Flex, while your starting lineup was 10 players, only the offensive lineup counts for the shorthanded rule. This means with DP/Flex you need 8 players offensively to continue the game, just as before.

The Power of the DP/Flex Rule²

The DP/Flex is a powerful tool in the hands of a coach who understands the rule.

Suppose a team has a hot glove - a true vacuum cleaner in the infield - but she can't hit a lick - a guaranteed out when she comes up to bat. Suppose a team has a player who is almost guaranteed to get on base one way or another, can steal second before the catcher can stand up, but struggles defensively. DP/Flex allows a team to turn this situation into an advantage instead of a disadvantage. They can use 10 weapons against the opposition's nine. They can use their 9 best fielders and bat their 9 best even if they aren't the same nine.

Most coaches understand this part of the DP/Flex rule since it is very similar to the DH rule from baseball. However, if this is all they use the DP/Flex rule for, they are missing its most powerful possibilities.

Have you wanted to give your players a breather during those hot championship tournaments, but you don't want to burn your substitution possibilities too early in the game? The DP/Flex rule can allow you to do this.

Have you ever been late in game, and one of your players can't go on the field, but you have used all of your substitutes? The DP/Flex rule can allow you to continue with 9 on defense.

Here are some examples:

DP is batting for the pitcher (Flex).

1. It is a hot August day, with oppressive humidity. This is your third game of the afternoon, and your players are dragging. In the 2nd inning, your SS is struggling. So, you send the DP out to play SS. This is not a substitution, it is merely a defensive position

swap.

The DP is now handling the defensive function of the SS and is handling the offensive function of the pitcher. Next inning, the SS is back & ready to take the field, but the LF now needs a breather. Now, the DP is going to play LF defensively - just like at SS the earlier inning. All this time, the DP is still the DP, the pitcher is still the pitcher, the SS is still the SS, and the LF is still the LF. There have been no lineup additions, no substitutions, just defensive position changes.

2. It is bottom of the 7th on a long tournament day, you are the visitors and have a one run lead. Your opposition is a power hitting team, and has been giving your outfield a workout all game with long outfield fly balls. Your CF cannot continue due to the heat. The top of their order is due up. You have used all of your substitutes.

Without the DP/Flex, you would be forced to try to hold back this team with 8 players on defense. You, however, understand the DP /Flex rule, and you send the DP in to play CF. Just like in example 1, this is not a substitution it is merely a defensive position swap. You can avoid having to try to finish the game shorthanded, with a huge gap in the outfield against this power-hitting team. And, if they do tie the game, you have not removed the center fielder from the game, so she has time to recover for her time at bat.

As you can see, the DP/Flex rule is perhaps the most powerful rule in the book for a coach who understands the possibilities. It is much more than just a complicated version of the DH rule in baseball. It is an extremely flexible weapon in championship games.

¹ F10 is not the official designation for this position. I have called it that as a aid to thinking about defensive position swaps only.

What is the LOOK BACK RULE?

The Look Back Rule When Runners Are on Base

One rule that usually comes into play in fastpitch softball is the look back rule when runners are on base. What is the rationale behind this? When does this rule take place? Does this have something to do with the pitcher looking back at the any runner on base? What is the penalty when such rule has been violated? – All these and more as we look into the elements, aspects, and consequences governing the look back rule.

Look Back Rule Defined

According to the ASA fastpitch softball rule book, the look back rule specifies that when the pitcher has control of the ball inside the pitcher's circle and does not attempt to make a play on any runner, then all runners who are on base must stay on the base.

On the other hand, any runner off the base must either go back to the previous base or advance to the next base without any hesitation. This means that if the runner off base, while on his way to any base either stops or changes direction, then he will be called out.

The look back rule is somehow a misnomer because there is no requirement for the pitcher to "look back" whatsoever.

Elements of the Look Back Rule

The look back rule only takes place if:

1. The pitcher has control of the ball.
2. There is no attempt on the part of the pitcher to make a play.

What does control of the ball mean?

This means that first, the pitcher must have the ball in her hand or the glove; second, the pitcher must be inside the pitcher's circle or that the feet must at least touch the lines of the radius. The pitcher's circle is the 8-foot radius marked around the pitcher's plate or rubber.

What if the ball is in the glove but on the ground?

This would not be considered as having control of the ball. The same does not apply if the ball is placed between the legs or under the arm.

What is a play?

The pitcher is said to make a play when he makes a throw that triggers a runner to react, upon the judgment of the umpire. This also applies even if the pitcher only fakes a throw or threatens to make a throw. As a rule, a play on one runner is already considered a play on the rest of the runners.

Why the look back rule?

The look back rule has been established in order to speed up the game. It compels the runner to stay on the base in order for the next pitch to be thrown. Otherwise, the players from both teams may play the cat-and-mouse game and if they do this every time, then it would certainly be time-consuming and would only distract people from the game.

Does the look back rule apply to the batter-runner?

The look back rule also applies to the batter-runner (including base-on-balls, dropped third strike, and hit). However, take note that such rule will only take effect the moment the batter-runner touches 1st base. There are certain scenarios to consider as well.

Important note: The batter-runner is only allowed to stop once.

If the batter-runner makes a stop on 1st base, then he should not leave the base. If he takes two steps off 1st base, he is called out.

Why two steps?

This is in order for the umpire to make a clear call and do away with the guessing game.

If the batter-runner rounds 1st base...

If the batter-runner rounds 1st base (meaning he cuts 1st base and immediately heads to 2nd base), he is allowed to stop only once at any point between 1st base and 2nd base. Then he must either immediately return to previous base or advance to the next without stopping or change of direction.

If the batter-runner overruns 1st base...

If the batter-runner overruns first base towards right field, turns left, and stops, then the player must either return to 1st base or advance to 2nd base. If he moves to 1st base and is tagged, he is not called out. Conversely, if the player advances to 2nd base and is tagged, then he is called out.

If the batter-runner overruns 1st base towards right field and turns right, then she is committed to 1st base. Therefore, he must return to 1st base without stopping or changing direction; otherwise, he is out.

If the batter-runner overruns 1st base towards right field, turns left; and heads toward 2nd base and then stops, the player is committed to 2nd base. Hence, he must attempt to reach 2nd base without stopping or changing direction; otherwise, he is called out.

What is the penalty for violating the look back rule on base runners?

The following consequences apply to any violation of the look back rule:

The umpire calls a dead ball. The runner is out.

If there are two or more runners off the base, note that only one runner is called out. A dead ball is called; and the rest of the runners must return to the last base they were on.