

Basic rules

Following are some of the basic concepts of the game of Fastpitch softball that often lead to controversy through misunderstanding.

Ball/strike

The strike zone is that space over any part of home plate between the batter's armpits and the top of his/her knees when the batter assumes his/her natural batting stance.

A 'strike' is called by the umpire:

- (a) When any part of a legally pitched ball passes through any part of the strike zone before touching the ground.
- (b) For each legally pitched ball that does not pass through this strike zone but is swung at and missed by the batter.
- (c) For each foul ball not legally caught on the fly when the batter has less than two strikes.
- (d) For each pitched ball struck at and missed which touches any part of the batter.
- (e) When any part of the batter's person or clothing is hit with his/her own batted ball when the batter is in the batting box and has less than two strikes.
- (f) When a pitched ball hits the batter when he/she is in the strike zone
- (g) When the batter fails to enter the batter's box within ten seconds after the umpire calls 'Play Ball'.

A 'ball' is called by the umpire:

- (a) For each legally pitched ball that does not pass through any part of the strike zone and is not swung at by the batter.
- (b) For each legally pitched ball that touches the ground before reaching home plate and is not swung at by the batter.
- (c) For each legally pitched ball that touches home plate and is not swung at by the batter.
- (d) For each illegally pitched ball.
- (e) When a legally pitched ball hits the batter outside of the strike zone.
- (f) When the pitcher fails to pitch the ball within 20 seconds.
- (g) For each excessive warm up pitch.
- (h) When the catcher fails to return the ball directly to the pitcher when there are no runners on base except after a strike out or put out by the catcher or when the batter becomes a baserunner.

Fair/foul

A 'fair ball' is a legally batted ball which:

- (a) Settles on fair territory between home and 1st Base or between home and 3rd Base.
- (b) Bounds past 1st or 3rd Base on or over fair territory.
- (c) Touches 1st, 2nd or 3rd Base.
- (d) While on or over fair territory touches the person or clothing of an umpire or player.
- (e) First falls on fair territory beyond 1st Base or 3rd Base.

- (f) While over fair territory, passes out of the playing field beyond the outfield fence.
- (g) Hits a foul line pole on the fly. If the ball hits the pole above the fence level, it will be a home run.

A 'foul ball' is a legally batted ball which:

- (a) Settles on foul territory between home and 1st Base or home and 3rd Base.
- (b) Bounds past 1st or 3rd Base on or over foul territory.
- (c) First falls on foul territory beyond 1st or 3rd Base.
- (d) While on or over foul territory touches the person or clothing of an umpire or player or any object foreign to the natural ground.
- (e) Touches the batter whilst in the batter's box.
- (f) Immediately rebounds up from the ground and touches the bat a second time while the batter is in the batter's box.

Forced/free runners

A forced runner is a runner who must run to the next base because the batter has hit a fair ball, so that not more than one runner is on a base.

For example:

When there is a runner at 1st Base and the batter hits a fair hit, the runner at 1st is a forced runner.

When there are runners at 1st and 2nd Bases and the batter hits a fair hit, both runners are forced runners.

When bases are loaded (runners at 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bases) when the batter hits a fair hit, all runners are forced runners.

A forced runner may be played out at the base to which he/she is advancing or legally tagged off base.

Note: A batter is always a forced runner after he/she hits a fair hit.

A free runner is a runner who does not have to run to the next base when the batter hits a fair hit. A free runner may run to the next base if he/she wishes.

For example:

When there is only a runner at 2nd Base when the batter hits a fair hit, the runner is a free runner as 1st Base is not occupied.

When there are runners on 2nd and 3rd Bases when the batter hits a fair hit, both runners are free runners as 1st Base is not occupied.

When there is a runner at 3rd Base and the batter hits a fair hit, the runner at 3rd Base is a free runner as 2nd Base is not occupied.

A free runner must be legally tagged off base to be put out.