

The Infield Fly Rule

Have you ever wondered why there is an "Infield Fly Rule" in baseball and softball?

The infield fly rule is one of the oldest rules in the game, making its first appearance in baseball rules in 1895. In that year it was in effect with one out. In 1901, the rule was amended to the exact form we use today.

With runners on first and second, or the bases loaded, AND with less than two outs, if the batter hits a fly ball that can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort, the batter is out. If it were not for that rule, wily infielders could try for an easy double play by letting the ball drop untouched to the ground, then throwing for a force out at third base, with the relay catching another runner before he/she reaches his/her base.

Knowing the rule isn't enough. Umpires must follow proper mechanics when making the call. In fact, this is one of the few instances where some of the field mechanics are incorporated into the actual rules language.

When the ball has reached its highest point, the umpire is to say "Infield fly, the batter is out."

The umpire should not "rush to judgment." On windy days, a ball that starts out as an infield fly might end up deep in the outfield. Or, a ball that seems headed for the outfield might end up being easily caught by an infielder.

Remember, the runners will be hanging around near the bases anyway. Since the purpose of the rule is not to give the defense a cheap out, and to prevent the offense from hitting into a cheap double play, wait until you're certain the ball can be caught with ordinary effort.

If the fly is coming down near the foul line, the umpires must say: "Infield fly, the batter's out, if fair."

Generally speaking, any umpire can determine the status of any potential infield fly and his/her partner should echo the call and signal after his/her partner has made his/her judgment.