



Memorandum

DATE: January, 2026
TO: CIF Coaches
CIF Umpires
COPY: Chris Fahey
Joe Hoggatt
Section Commissioners
FROM: Ken Allan,
California State Baseball Rules Interpreter
Former Member, NFHS Rules Committee
RE: 2026 Rule Interpretations, Points of Emphasis

The following information is provided to commissioners, coaches, and umpires in an effort to provide consistency in rule enforcement and game management. Please see the Standards of Conduct section. Also, please review the definition of malicious contact. Any questions should be directed to Ken Allan at: kensport101@earthlink.net. (909) 861-7767.

These are the significant rule changes, points of emphasis and interpretations for the 2026 season. **Please be sure your lower division coaches have a copy.**

NOTE TO INSTRUCTIONAL CHAIRMEN

Please do not add to or change any information in this memo. This material has been approved by the CIF State Office and is expected to be published as is.
Thank you.

COMMENTS ON THE 2026 RULE CHANGES

There are three rule changes for 2026

1-6-3

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

2-10-3

A player-to-player defensive meeting includes two or more defensive players. All defensive meetings whether it involves players and coaches or players and players will count as a conference. Previously, only meetings between players and a coach counted as a charged

conference. Each team, while on defense, may be granted not more than one player-to-player meeting during an inning. Umpires shall deny any subsequent defensive team requests for that half-inning. Additionally, Rule 2-10-3 was added to define a player-to-player defensive meeting as having two or more defensive players. After the pitcher's warmup is completed, infielders may briefly gather at the pitcher's mound. This will not be charged as a player-to-player meeting.

3-1-4a

If a pinch-hitter or pinch-runner for the designated hitter is used, that player becomes the new designated hitter.

There are two rules which will go into effect in 2027. More detailed information will be available in the 2027 memo.

1-2-9

A double first base will be required to minimize the risk of collisions by runners and fielders. **Please note that the use of the double first base is not legal in the CIF for the 2026 season.** However, some schools play on public fields with a permanent double first base. In that case, umpires should officiate 2026 plays at first base as has been done in the past

1-4-4

Allows a school's name, nickname, logo, mascot and/or defensive player's name to be permitted on a uniform top and/or pants.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

For clarity and brevity, this is a condensed and/or revised version of the POE. For a complete review of the POE, please refer to the 2026 rule book.

Discipline

Baseball is a very competitive sport and sometimes, emotions can run high. It is imperative for coaches and players to respect the decisions of umpires. It's expected that a coach will ask for an explanation on an unusual play. It is not expected that a coach will continue the discussion after receiving an answer to his question.

Sportsmanship (Bench Jockeying and Props)

By rule, bench jockeying (3-3-1-f-2) is prohibited. It is not only considered unsportsmanlike behavior, it can, without appropriate game control by umpires, lead to further, sometimes serious, problems. Also, there is no logical purpose to have props at an education-based athletic event. The dugout should be a place of encouragement and unity. Let the game be decided by skill, preparation and respect, not by unnecessary noise and antics

Proper Pitching Positions

The NFHS has made this easy. If a pitcher's pivot foot is in contact with and parallel with the pitcher's plate, he is considered to be in a set position. Thus, he must come to a complete and discernible stop after coming to set position before delivering a pitch. Any other foot placement will be considered a windup position.

Running Lane Awareness

Remember, the purpose of the running lane rule is to: Provide for safety by preventing collisions for the batter/runner and fielder. Provide for fair play by avoiding unfair interference with defensive plays. Provide for consistency by regular enforcement of the rule. Teaching proper lane use reinforces respect for rules and the game.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

OUT-OF-STATE TEAMS—Coaches, if you have scheduled games with out-of-state teams, please be sure they know in advance that California requires all base coaches to wear helmets. There have been issues when some teams only had double ear flap with face guard helmets available.

MALICIOUS CONTACT—Umpires continue to do a good job in enforcing this rule. As a reminder:

Malicious contact is violent, avoidable contact between two opposing players. It often occurs when a runner collides with a fielder in an effort to dislodge possession of the ball. Malicious contact can also occur when a fielder unnecessarily applies a hard tag to a runner. Intent and play situation must be a consideration in determining malicious contact. Hard contact is not, in itself, malicious contact.

PROPER LINING OF THE FIELD—This was mentioned last year. There have still been several reports of fields not properly lined. This includes fields that lack the lines of the coach's box and the on-deck circle. Not having the catcher's box lined continues to be a wide-spread issue. Also, it has been noted that a number of fields, with brown grass infields, do not have the 3-foot runner's lane marked. Please see page nine of the rule book. If you have control of your field, please be sure these rule-required markings are visible. As an umpire and you work a game with a field not properly lined, please report this to your area liaison and have him contact the school.

PITCH COUNT REGULATIONS—Can be found in section 1500 of the CIF Constitution.

BASEBALL OFFICIAL'S RESOURCES—Go to the CIF website (cifstate.org) and find the link Baseball Official's Resources to find a number of valuable articles and handouts about game management and other aspects of umpiring.

UMPIRE'S TIME MANAGEMENT—Time management is crucial to how the game progresses. Umpires must be consistent in motivating both teams to get on and off the field and to expedite conferences. A good example would be sure to have someone warm up the pitcher if the catcher was batting or on base on the third out of an inning. These are areas an umpire can be a positive factor in keeping the game moving at an acceptable pace.

FACILITIES—If there is an issue with field conditions that cannot be made reasonably hazard-free, the event should be relocated or rescheduled. An example would be standing water on the field.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Coaches and players are expected to maintain a standard of conduct which is necessary for the proper administration of the game and is consistent with behavioral expectations of students and staff in a classroom environment. Umpires have considerable latitude in removing coaches and players for various acts which interfere with the game. Many problems can and should be resolved with verbal cautions or warnings. Below, however, are examples of behavior that would likely require an ejection:

1. A player drawing a line on the dirt to indicate the location of a pitch.
2. Profanity by either a coach or player directed at an umpire or profanity loud enough to likely be heard by fans.
3. A coach refusing to return to the dugout or coaching lines after an umpire has explained a ruling.
4. Jumping up and down or other such actions to show displeasure over a call or ruling whether from the dugout or the field.
5. Any non-playing action related contact with an umpire, whether it's accidental or intentional.
6. The throwing of equipment such as bats or helmets in reaction to a call or ruling.
7. A coach or player who refuses to follow verbal directions from an umpire relating to the administration of the game.
8. A coach who leaves his position, after being warned, to argue balls and strikes.
9. Blatant violation of the rules such as cutting considerably short of third base in scoring a run.

POST-GAME EJECTIONS

POST GAME EJECTIONS—In the event of a problem with coaches, players or fans after the conclusion of a game, the umpires should write a report just as they would with an in-game ejection. This document should be reported in the same manner as an in-game ejection. Any post-game incidents that involve identifiable individuals should be filed as an ejection report and not an incident report. An incident report should be filed for any event that involves unidentifiable individuals (usually spectators/fans). Umpires should report any unsportsmanlike conduct that occurs involving them until they leave the game site.

BENCH JOCKEYING—There were reports last year of bench jockeying. Bench-jockeying occurs when words or actions reflect unfavorably toward another person or team. Proper game control requires that this behavior must be immediately addressed by the officials and coaches.

REMINDERS WHICH ARE HELPFUL TO COACHES AND UMPIRES IN GAME ADMINISTRATION

These items have appeared in the past and are repeated as an aid to proper game management and pace of play.

FOUL BALLS—In order to keep games moving more smoothly, it is strongly recommended that any ball retrieved by the on-deck hitter, or a long foul ball on the visitor's side of the

field, be rolled to the home dugout as soon as possible. If you are the visiting team and your
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on-deck batter retrieves a ball at the backstop, please have him roll it to the home dugout rather than taking it with him back to the on-deck circle. Let's continue to give this a good effort as it is a big help in keeping the game moving. Umpires are asked to remind coaches of this at the pregame meeting.

LINE UP CARDS—Coaches, please do not separate lineup cards. Just hand everything to the plate umpire. It is acceptable to provide a copy of the lineup card to the opposing team scorekeeper before the pregame meeting at home plate. Umpires are instructed to take the home lineup card first, then the visiting lineup card before inspecting either of the lineup cards.

LINEUP CARDS II—If you are using a designated hitter, please list the DH either directly below or directly across from the player for whom he is hitting. Please do not list the DH at the bottom of the lineup card, unless of course, he is batting for the player ninth in the order.

PREGAME MEETING—It has been noted that during the pregame meeting at home plate, members of the visiting team have often been observed outside their dugout warming up with bats. Rule 2-10-2 provides that BOTH teams must remain in the dugout during the pregame meeting. Please remind your teams.

LEAVING THE DUGOUT DURING A LIVE BALL—Coaches continue to do a good job in helping umpires enforce this rule. If players leave the dugout to congratulate a scoring runner during a live ball, the coach will receive a warning. Any following violators are subject to ejection. Coaches are also asked to remain within the lines of the coaching box.

COACHING ATTIRE—Umpires are expected to enforce this rule. This is usually an issue in lower-level games. As per rule 3-2-1, coaches must be in the uniform of their team. As a guideline, the following is acceptable: Baseball shoes, baseball pants, a jersey top similar to what the team is wearing, either a tee shirt with a team logo, wind shirt with a team logo, a jacket, and a baseball cap. The following is NOT acceptable at ANY level: Coaches who are wearing shorts, or other non-baseball attire such as, but not limited to, sweatpants, jeans, tennis shoes, or sandals. These items are not permissible. The penalty for non-compliance is that the coach is restricted to the dugout. If the team's only coach is in non-compliance, he will be allowed on the field to participate in the pre-game meeting at home plate. He will also be allowed on the field to attend to an injured player. Otherwise, he must remain in the dugout.

THANKS—To all the coaches and umpires for their past cooperation and good luck for 2026.