

The Cal Ripken Contact Rule

There is no codified “must slide rule” at any Babe Ruth or Cal Ripken level. Because some leagues adopt a “must slide rule” for the regular season, managers, coaches, players and parents are often surprised that the rule is not in affect for post-season tournaments as well.

The contact rule, as stated on page 19 of the rulebook, is below:

Contact Rule (all divisions) – If a runner attempting to reach home plate intentionally and maliciously runs into a defensive player in the area of home plate, he will be called out on the play and ejected from the game. The objective of this rule is to penalize the offensive team for deliberate, unwarranted, unsportsmanlike action by the runner for the obvious purpose of crashing the defensive player, rather than trying to reach home plate. Obviously, this is an umpire’s judgment call.

What this rule means is that the runner cannot be called out for “not sliding” when attempting to score. The rule does not mandate sliding nor does it strictly prohibit contact between the offensive and defensive players. It simply requires the runner to make a reasonable attempt to not initiate contact while trying to score.

In situations when the defensive player, without the ball, impedes the runner the obstruction rule (7.06) covers the situation. Part of this rule addresses home plate situations and states “the baseline belongs to the runner and the catcher should be there only when he is fielding a ball or when he already has the ball in his hand.”

It is clear from the above verbiage that at times both the runner and the catcher have the right to be at home plate. In these situations (runner trying to score and catcher with the ball at the plate) contact will occur. It is up to the umpire to decide if either player is guilty of “deliberate, unwarranted, unsportsmanlike action.” If in the umpire’s opinion either is guilty that player should be ejected. Normally it is the moving runner and not the stationary catcher that initiates the contact, but if the catcher does they should be ejected as well. Further, the intent of this rule should be enforced on the entire field of play, not just at home plate.

Booster Club Directors need to take the lead in informing their managers and parents that during post season play there is no “must slide rule.” Players will not be called out for naturally occurring contact whether or not they slide. Tournament directors need to inform umpires covering the tournaments that there is no “must slide rule” for tournament play. Qualified umpires will understand the rule, which is sometimes described as “slide or avoid.”

Respectfully Submitted,

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Umpire in Chief

Davidson County Babe Ruth League