

Batter Hit by Pitch

When the batter is hit by a pitch (the batter's person, the batter's hands, the batter's clothing are all "the batter") two things happen: (1) the ball is dead, and (2) the batter is typically awarded first base. Any runners forced to advance also move up.

There are a number of exceptions to part (2) of this rule. (The ball is ALWAYS dead; it's just what happens afterwards that can change.)

If the ball is in the strike zone or the batter swings (both of which are judgment calls) then it is simply a strike (it could be strike three). This makes sense: why should the defense get penalized by the pitcher throwing a strike?

The Rule Book tells us "If no attempt is made to avoid being hit, the batter will not be awarded first base unless it is ball four." So how much does the batter need to do to avoid being hit? Not much. The ball does not belong against the batter's body. We certainly do not want to encourage the pitcher to throw at the batter and, thus, we err on the side of the batter getting first.

Three quick examples help illustrate:

A) The pitched ball is behind the batter who ducks backwards and gets hit by the ball. Dead ball, first base.

B) The batter comes to the plate with a huge pad on her elbow. She is crowding the plate. The pitch comes in right down the middle of the plate, belly button high. The ball hits the pad and the batter heads towards first. It's a dead ball and a strike! No first base award.

C) The pitcher hits her leg as she is releasing the pitch. The ball is slowly rolling along the ground. While waiting for the ball to get to the plate, the shortstop goes into the dugout, gets a deck of cards, and is playing Go Fish with the left fielder. The ball hits the batter's foot. Dead ball, ball on the batter. No first base award.

As a plate umpire what should we do when the batter is hit? First, we call Dead Ball loudly to let everyone know the batter was hit. Then we tell the batter to go to first. At the same time we come out from behind the catcher and walk the batter toward first, staying between the batter and the pitcher. We go as far as necessary to ensure that nothing stupid happens: The batter is in pain, she (in her mind) just got prevented from hitting a triple, the pitcher hit her intentionally, and she is still holding her bat. What bad can happen? If at all warranted, give the coach time to visit with the player at first base – it will calm things down and also give the pitcher time to compose herself (so she can keep the next ball away from the next batter). As a crew, give the coach the option of having the hit player run down the foul line (towards the outfield) to see if her legs still work – it shows our compassion and gives the hit player even more time to recover (and get the tears out of her eyes).