

This article will not discuss what constitutes an illegal pitch, but rather it discusses the ramifications of an illegal pitch. In 2020 the USA Softball rules changed to align the illegal pitch penalty with the penalty defined in a number of other rule sets: basically changing from “a ball on the batter and each runner advances one base” to just “a ball on the batter.”

There are a few additional pieces to the illegal pitch penalty:

- (1) When an illegal pitch is called, it is a delayed dead ball;
- (2) If the batter gets to (at least) 1st base, and each runner (if any) advances (at least) one base, the illegal pitch is canceled and the result of the play stands;
- (3) If the batter is hit by an illegal pitch (which is not otherwise a strike), the ball is dead, the batter is awarded first base. Runners advance only if forced.
- (4) If neither (2) nor (3) happens, the offensive head coach has the option of taking the result of the play, or the illegal pitch penalty (a ball on the batter) with all runners being returned to the base occupied at the time of the pitch.

But there are some interesting ramifications to this rule which are best illustrated by examples.

Example 1:

An excellent hitter is at bat followed by a very weak hitter. The count is 3 balls and 1 strike. There are two outs and a runner at 3rd base. The batter swings and misses an illegal pitch. The offensive head coach has the choice of the result of the play (a strike on the batter yielding a 3-2 count) or the illegal pitch penalty (ball 4 resulting in the batter being awarded 1st base). In this scenario the coach may choose to keep the excellent hitter at bat with a 3-2 count rather than have a weaker hitter come to bat.

Example 2:

R1 on 1st base. 0-2 count on batter, B1. R1 steals on an illegal pitch. B1 swings and misses. R1 is safe at 2nd base. The offensive head coach has the choice between the result of the play (R1 on 2nd base with B1 out due to strike 3) or R1 returned to 1st base with a 1-2 count on B1.

Example 3:

R1 on 1st base. 3-0 count on batter, B1. R1 tries to steal on an illegal pitch. B1 swings and misses. R1 is caught stealing and out at 2nd base. The offensive head coach has the choice between the result of the play (R1 out and 3-1 count on the batter) or the illegal pitch penalty (R1's out canceled, ball 4 on B1 – awarded 1st base, R1 awarded 2nd base – forced by B1's award of 1st base).

Example 4:

R1 at 1st, R2 at 2nd, R3 at 3rd, no outs, 1-1 count on batter, B1. B1 grounds an illegal pitch to short. R3 scores, R2 is forced out at 3rd base, R1 is safe at 2nd base, and B1 is safe at 1st base. The offensive head coach is given the choice between the result of the play (described above), or R3 returned to 3rd base (no run scores), R2 returned to 2nd base (not out), R1 returned to 1st base, 2-1 count on B1.