

Be Careful Using Other Sports to Explain Softball Rules

No-calls are common to officiating in all sports. Sometimes it's advantageous to use examples from other sports to explain softball rules and plays. Unfortunately, many times players or coaches quote rules from other sports trying to convince us we've made the wrong call.

Here are two examples. Accept one and refute the other.

By far, the most erroneously used crossover rule is from football. That is when a fielder makes a spectacular effort while attempting to catch a fly ball. It usually happens that the fielder has the ball inside the glove, then rolls on the ground, only to have the ball end up on the ground.

Immediately after we [signal no catch](#), we usually hear, "Hey! I had it when I hit the ground. The ground can't make you fumble."

A correct interpretation, but for the wrong sport. When coaches come out to discuss the call, my first reply is to assure the coaches that their understanding of the rule is correct for football. However, in softball, that rationale doesn't apply.

The rulebook makes the determination of a catch easy with the inclusion of the statement, "The release must be voluntary and intentional." So after the coach has pleaded his or her case, I pointedly ask him or her, "Coach, did your fielder intentionally let that ball go so it would fall on the ground?" Most of the time I receive an incredulous look from the coach and an adamant, "Of course not." With that, I tell the coach that part of the definition of a catch is that the release of the ball has to be voluntary and intentional. The coach has already told me that the release was not intentional, ending the argument.

As Plan B, I could also say that in football, the ground can't cause a fumble, but it can cause an incomplete pass, which is also somewhat analogous.

The other crossover rule example that we can use is from basketball. Many softball fields are not ideal, to say the least. In fact, you'll find softball fields in many locations that have nothing more than a backstop. Because of that, you have opportunities for balls to go out of play and even players going out of play.

There's a question about a [player being on the playing field when making a catch](#) and subsequently going into the dead-ball area. One example is an outfielder catching a ball at the fence and then falling over the fence. Similarly, when using chalk lines to mark dead-ball areas, you have the possibility of catches being made near the out-of-play area and the fielder continuing into the dead-ball area.

The basketball rule used to explain the proper interpretation of those softball plays concerns where a player establishes her location on the court. Many times, when a ball is going out of bounds, players leave the court by jumping into the air and are actually "out of bounds" in the air before knocking the ball back into the court and landing out of bounds. The important concept here is the player's location when she becomes airborne. If done properly, the player's position is inbounds because that is the area she was in before she touched anything out of bounds.

So it is for softball. If the player jumps into the air to make a catch, has control of the ball and then falls over the outfield fence, you have an out. She made the catch. Award bases for unintentionally taking the ball into dead-ball territory.

The same is true for catches that are close to a chalk line. As long as the fielder's last contact is in the playing field, she can be in the air over dead-ball territory and make the catch. If she comes down in dead-ball territory, award bases accordingly.

Whether making calls or no-calls, we can draw other parallels from other sports. The challenge is to know the parallels and understand which ones we should accept and which ones to refute.