

The Infield Fly

Evans' Baseball Rules Annotated

Rule 2.00 Infield Fly - is a fair ball (not including a line drive nor an attempted bunt) which can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort, when first and second, or first, second and third bases are occupied, before two are out. The pitcher, catcher and any outfielder who stations himself in the infield on the play shall be considered infielders for the purpose of this rule.

When it seems apparent that a batted ball will be an Infield Fly, the umpire shall immediately declare "Infield Fly" for the benefit of the runners. If the ball is near the baselines, the umpire shall declare "Infield Fly, if fair."

The ball is alive and runners may advance at the risk of the ball being caught, or retouch and advance after the ball is touched, the same as on any fly ball. If the hit becomes a foul ball, it is treated the same as any foul.

If a declared Infield Fly is allowed to fall untouched to the ground, and bounces foul before passing first or third base, it is a foul ball. If a declared Infield Fly falls untouched to the ground outside the baseline, and bounces fair before passing first or third base, it is an Infield Fly.

Official Notes - Case Book - Comments: On the infield fly rule the umpire is to rule whether the ball could ordinarily have been handled by an infielder, not by some arbitrary limitation such as the grass, or the baselines. The umpire must rule also that a ball is an infield fly, even if handled by an outfielder, if, in the umpire's judgment, the ball could have been as easily handled by an infielder. The infield fly is in no sense to be considered an appeal play. The umpire's judgment must govern, and the decision should be made immediately.

When an infield fly rule is called, runners may advance at their own risk. If on an infield fly rule, the infielder intentionally drops a fair ball, the ball remains in play despite the provisions of Rule 6.05(1). The infield fly rule takes precedence.

Cross References: 6.05(e,1), 7.08(f)

Rather than simply defining the infield fly, this definition is the most comprehensive explanation of the infield fly rule to be found.

The original infield fly rule first appeared in the professional code in 1894. It stated that the batsman is out "... if he hits a fly ball that can be handled by an infielder while first base is occupied with only one out."

This rule was instituted to counter chicanery by the defensive team in inducing the double play or retiring a speedier baserunner.

The very next year, 1895, the rule was amended to apply anytime first and second, or first, second, and third bases were occupied with one out. The rules makers realized that the double play was virtually impossible if the batsman ran with "dispatch" when only first base was occupied. However, the trick double play was very possible when two or more runners were on base and forced by the actions of the batter.

Strangely, however, it was not until 1901 that the infield fly rule was rewritten to include these situations anytime there were less than two outs. This, of course, is the rule as it applies today.

The early-day umpire was supposed to declare immediately as soon as the ball was hit either "infield or outfield hit" to alert the runners.

Today's professional umpire is trained to declare only the infield fly after the ball has reached its apex and an infielder is stationed in a position which will enable him to handle the ball with ordinary effort.

An outfielder who positions himself where an infielder might ordinarily play shall be considered an infielder for the purpose of this rule.

No grass or painted line shall be used to determine the optimum range of an infield fly.

The infield fly rule does not apply on a bunted ball; however, the intentionally dropped ball rule does...6.05(1).

When an "infield fly" has been declared, the batter is always out, but the runners may advance without tagging up if the ball is not caught.

Rule 6.05(e) A batter is out when an Infield Fly is declared.

Cross References: 2.00 Infield Fly, 2.00 Line Drive, 6.05(1), 7.08(f)

Historical Notes: The infield fly rule, as this rule is commonly known, was the practical solution to a brand of play which surfaced and was contradictive to the spirit of the American game. With less than two outs, infielders would "muff" or "fail to field" fly balls which would ordinarily be handled with ease, thus forcing runners on base into easy double plays.

In 1895, the infield fly rule as we know it was first introduced. It stated that the batter was

out if he hit a fly ball that could be handled by an infielder while first and second, or first, second, and third bases were occupied with only one out. In 1901, the rule was rewritten to expand the rule and include all these situations "...unless two hands are out."

Umpires of that era were instructed to inform the runners each time a fly ball was out in those game situations. They were to shout either "Infield fly!" or "Outfield fly!" Today's umpire vocally and visually informs the runners only when the infield fly has been ruled, not when the ball is considered an "outfield fly".

Through the years, modifications have been made to the rule. In 1904, line drives were specifically excluded from the rule. One must remember that fielding equipment was minimal at best and it was more difficult to intentionally deceive runners on line drives than other fly balls. With the advent of more sophisticated equipment, a new rule would be introduced which would restrict trickery by the defensive team...see the Intentionally Dropped Ball Rule -6.05(1).

The 1920 version of this rule specifically excluded the "bunt" as an infield fly. It also authorized the runners to "...be off their bases or advance at the risk of the ball being caught."

In 1940, a provision was made regarding a runner being hit by an infield fly. If in contact with a base when struck, the runner was not declared out. However, if a runner should be struck by an infield fly while off his base, he and the batter are declared out.

Explanatory text was added throughout the 1950's which (1) defined the pitcher and catcher as infielders, (2) made it permissible for an outfielder to catch an "infield fly", and (3) clarified fly balls that first touched foul and settled fair, and vice versa.

Professional Interpretation: Umpires often try to determine if a fielder is stationed comfortably beneath the ball before declaring the "infield fly." Wind conditions should be taken into consideration before making the "infield fly" call. As explained in 2.00, arbitrary distances should not be used as a gauge for making the ruling. See 7.08(f) for rulings regarding a runner being hit by an infield fly. Before ruling "infield fly," the umpire should determine that the batted ball has sufficient arc to distinguish it from a line drive (sharp and direct).

Situations: Bases loaded..one out...the shortstop intentionally drops a lazy pop-up near the second base bag. He recovers the ball quickly and tags out a surprised runner off the bag at second. Is the runner out, batter out, or both out?

Ruling: The side is retired. This is a double play. The batter is out on the infield fly rule. The ball remains alive and the runner is out when tagged. See 6.05(1).

Childress' Baseball Rules Differences

241 INFIELD FLY: UMPIRES ERR

FED:

(1) **UMPIRES WRONGLY DECLARE AN INFIELD FLY:** If a pop-up in the infield is not an infield fly (because, for example, first base is not occupied) but the umpires erroneously declare the batter out, it is not an in field fly and any action that occurs will stand. The offense has the responsibility for knowing whether conditions exist for an infield fly. (10.2.3f)

Note 180: While the case book play, which first appeared in 1985, places responsibility on the team at bat, the fielding team has the same responsibility. If a wrongly declared infield fly is uncaught, there is no out unless the defense executes a subsequent play.

(2) **UMPIRES FAIL TO DECLARE AN INFIELD FLY:** If a pop-up in the infield is an infield fly but the umpires fail to call it, the batter is out anyway since both teams "have the responsibility to know when conditions exist for an infield fly." (10.2.3g) Confirmed, News, #7, 3/92: "THE SITUATION DETERMINES THE OUT, NOT THE DECLARATION." (BRD emphasis) [See § 240.]

Note 181: Those eight little words from March, 1992, make the high school umpire's job very easy if he screws up an infield-fly call.

ALSO: OFF INTERP 92-241: Rumble ruled that when an infield fly occurs but is not declared, if any other runner is put out, that out will also stand. (News, #7, 3/92)

Note 182: The only problem with OFF INTERP 92-241 is that the umpire must subsequently agree that the batted ball was an in field fly. Some umpires don't like to admit mistakes, so they make a bigger one trying to cover up the first.

NCAA: No provisions. [See OFF INTERP 1-D.]

PRO: Point not covered by the rules.

OFF INTERP 93-241: Fitzpatrick ruled that the umpires must insure the intent of the rule is enforced. The offensive team must be protected from an "undeserved" double play. That could require a belated "infield fly" ruling and revocation of subsequent action: "Above all, do not allow a double play that should not occur." (phone call to SE, 7/20/92)

Note 183: In NCAA and PRO, if an umpire fails to declare properly an infield fly, then there was no infield fly unless a double play occurs. After the double play the umpires must rely on 3-7 and 9.01c to get it right. Additionally, if the umpire declares an in field

pop-up to be an infield fly when it is not, no infield fly occurred. What happens, happens. (That would conform to the FED ruling in such cases.)

Play 61-241: With runners on first and second and no outs, B1 hits a towering pop fly on the infield. F4 moves only a step or two before settling under the ball. Inexplicably, the umpires fail to declare the infield fly. At the last moment F4 steps back and the ball falls to the ground untouched; both R1 and R2 attempt to advance. F4 recovers the ball on one bounce, tags R1 and throws to third in time for a tag of R2 sliding in.

Ruling: In FED, the defense has secured a triple play. In NCAA and PRO, because the umpires failed to declare the infield fly the defense has recorded an “undeserved” double play. Therefore, the umpires must declare a dead ball, rule B1 out on the infield fly and return R1 and R2 to their respective bases.

Play 62-241: Runners are on first and second with no one out when B1 lifts an easy pop fly to the pitcher. The umpires fail to call infield fly, and F1 does not make the catch. He retrieves the ball in time to throw to third for a tag out of R2 sliding in as R1 goes to second and B1 stops on first.

Ruling: In FED, both B1 and R2 are out. In NCAA and PRO, because the defense did not record a double play, the play stands: one out, runners on first and second.

Play 63-241: FED rules only. Runners are on first and second when F1 uncorks a wild pitch and each runner advances. B1 then lifts an easy fly to the infield with the first baseman getting ready for the catch. The field umpire erroneously calls: "Infield fly; the batter is out." The first baseman drops the ball but recovers in time to throw out R3 at home as B1 stops on first and R2 takes third.

Ruling: The declaration of "infield fly" does not an infield fly make: "The situation determines the out, not the declaration." The play stands.

Note 184: I can attest to the accuracy of Play 63-241. On Tuesday: March 15, 1974 (Caesar isn't the only man bitten by the Ides of March) the Bulldogs entertained the Greyhounds with Henry Koon as the UIC and Carl Childress as the jerk who yelled out "Infield fly!" Even then, though, I was a rules man. Anticipating the FED interpretation by eight years, I correctly let the play stand - and was promptly scratched by both coaches. (Later I called playoff games for both men, which says something about me. Or the coaches.)

NAPBL Umpire Manual

4.9 INFIELD FLY INTENTIONALLY DROPPED

If on an infield fly rule the infielder intentionally drops a fair ball, the ball remains in play despite the provisions of Official Rule 6.05(L). The infield fly rule takes precedence.

LL Baseball - Umpire Clinic Manual

CHAPTER 9

THE INFIELD FLY

The infield fly rule is one of the most confusing rules in the minds of the typical player and fan.

DEFINITION: 2.00

An infield fly is a fair fly ball (not including a line drive nor an attempted bunt) which can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort, when first and second, or first, second and third bases are occupied, before two are out. The pitcher, catcher and any outfielder stationed in the infield on the play shall be considered infielders for the purpose of this rule.

When it seems apparent that a batted ball will be an infield fly, the umpire shall immediately declare "infield fly" for the benefit of the runners. If the ball is near the baseline, the umpire shall declare "infield fly, if fair". The ball is live and runners may advance at the risk of the ball being caught, or retouch and advance after the ball is touched, the same as on any fly ball. If the hit becomes a foul ball, it is treated the same as any foul.

SEVERAL POINTS MUST BE KEPT IN MIND INVOLVING THIS RULE

- A. First and second base must be occupied. Whether or not third base is occupied has no effect on the rule. There must be no outs or one out. The rule was created for the protection of the runners, not the fielder.

- A. A bunt may not be ruled an infield fly. By the nature of the play a penalty would be imposed on the offense rather than the defense
- B. A line drive may not be ruled an infield fly, as the calling of an I out in this situation would not protect the runners.

- A. The umpire must judge that the ball could have been caught with ordinary effort.

Exactly what is ordinary effort? Little League shortstops and major league shortstops play

under the same infield fly rule, but there's a universe of difference between their ordinary efforts. This is only one of the many situations that you as the umpire must use your judgment in determining what is ordinary effort for the player.

- A. The umpires must be alert for the possibility of an infield fly. They should have a signal between each other to make sure each one is aware of the situation. Normally, the infield fly is called by the umpire nearest the ball followed by all other umpires. This should be done in a loud tone with arm signals so that everyone involved in the play, as well as the spectators, know of the ruling.

RULING EXAMPLES:

- I. A runner standing on second base or any base is struck by a fly ball which has been declared an infield fly.

Ruling: The batter is out, the runner is not. Should the runner have been off the base when struck, both he and the batter would have been declared out.

- I. The bases are loaded with no outs. The infielders are playing in for a force play at the plate. A fly ball is hit which could have been easily caught if the infielder had been at normal depth. Because he is playing in, the infielder attempts to catch the ball while running with his back to the plate.

Ruling: This is not an infield fly. The position of the fielder, not the ball, is the determining factor in this case.

- I. An infield fly is declared by the umpire. The shortstop catches the ball and throws it to second base before the runner who had left the base can return.

Ruling: A double play results. When an infield fly is declared the batter is out. The runners are not forced to run. The ball remains alive and in play in all other respects.

- I. The infield fly situation is in effect. A fly ball is batted within the infield. No declaration is made by the umpire. All runners run. After the play is over, one of the umpires announces that he has applied the infield fly rule and the batter is out.

Ruling: This is a very serious mistake on the part of the umpire. An infield fly must be declared by the umpire as soon as he determines that the ball can be caught by the infielder with ordinary effort not after the play is over.

COMMENT: Not calling an infield fly because you don't think it is an infield fly (judgment) is perfectly acceptable, and preferred. However, not calling an infield fly because you forgot is not acceptable and is a correctable situation. (1) Do not allow the defense to turn an easy double play because you forgot to call it and (2) get the call right. Better late than not at all.