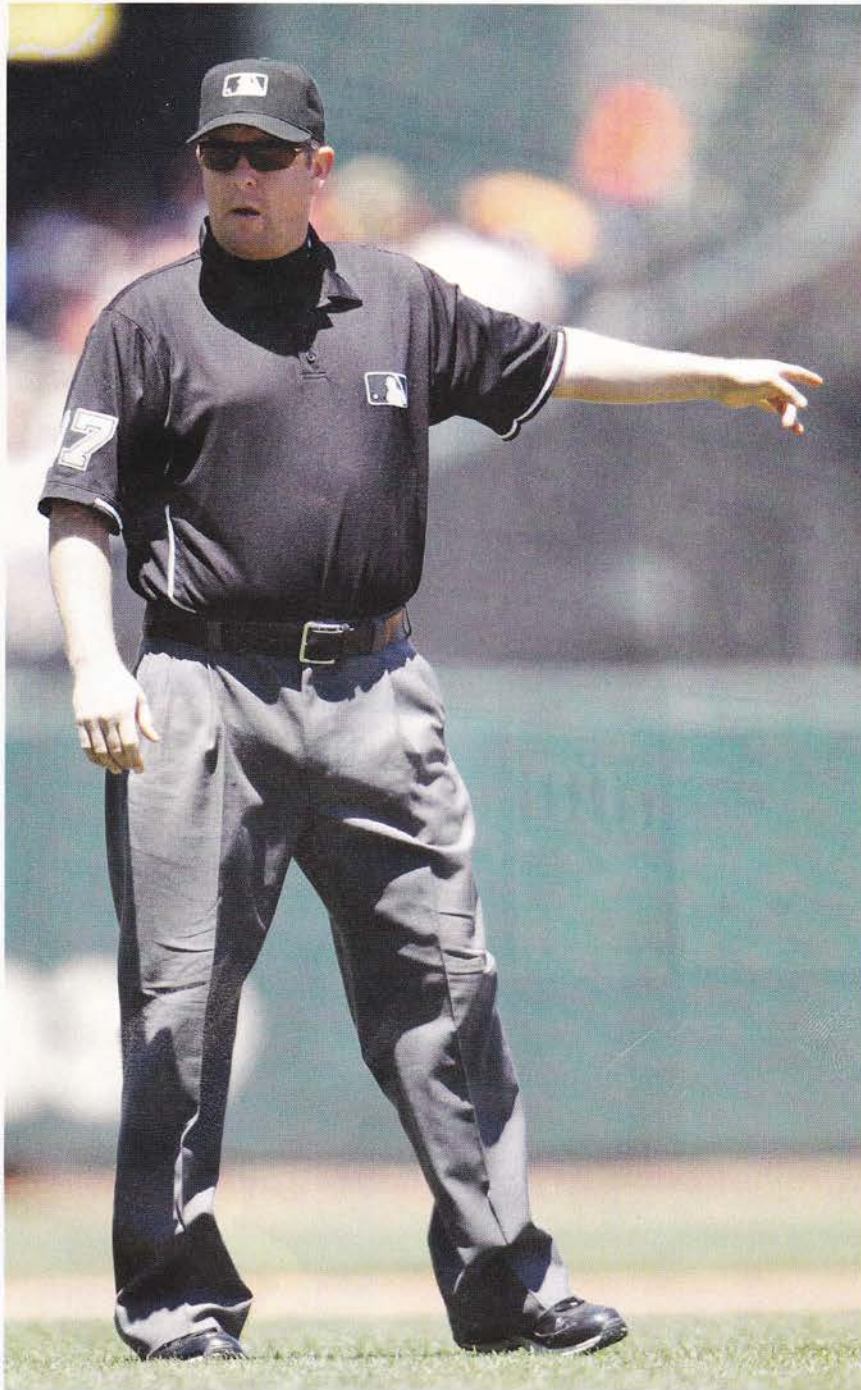


# STRETCH POSITION

## Rulebooks Give Umpires 'Elastic Power'



Todd Tichenor, Holcomb, Kan., indicates a runner has been awarded second base. The "elastic power" rule allows umpires to award bases, declare outs and make other decisions not specifically covered in the rules.

*Editor's note:* The following is an excerpt from *Baseball: Game Intelligence*, a book published by Referee. To purchase the book go to the Referee Training Center at [referee.com](http://referee.com) or call 800-733-6100.



By George Demetriou

Of all the major sports, baseball is probably the one most prone to events that do not have direct rules coverage. Retired AL umpire Jim Evans agrees that baseball seems to have more of those opportunities than any other sport. He also believes that umpires will not always find adequate explanations to help rectify problems when an umpire has erred.

In the early days of the game, the rulemakers took a wait-and-see approach. When something out of the ordinary occurred, the umpire would do whatever he thought was fair and rules would later be changed to address the situation.

One example is the rule regarding interference at the plate by a retired runner, which emanated from an umpire's on-the-spot decision in an 1887 American Association game. On an infield grounder that was booted, a runner scored from third and the runner on second tried to score. R3 hung around the plate and seeing his teammate would be out, he shoved the catcher, preventing a tag. In the melee that followed, the runner on first also scored. However, umpire Wesley Curry declared, "Obstruction," called R2 out and disallowed R1's run — baseball had a new rule.

Surprisingly, the "elastic clause" (NFHS 10-2-3g; NCAA 3-6b; pro 9.01c)

which gives umpires, especially the umpire-in-chief, authority to rule on situations that are not covered by rule, did not appear in pro rules until 1953.

Evans sees a clear need for a rule such as 9.01 (c) to enable the umpire to make a ruling on the spot that fairly administers the "spirit of the rules." Evans said, "Those 'on the spot' rulings should be made with common sense and in the best interest of fair play. It is critical that the umpire has a thorough working knowledge of the rulebook so that he does not create a ruling that is already covered in the book."

The NFHS and NCAA agree such a powerful rule must be used carefully. The rule does not allow rules to be created or ignored at an umpire's whim. It is not intended for umpires to set aside book rules for what they'd prefer. The rule can only be applied to those points that are not covered in the book. "An umpire must not only know what is in the rulebook, but he must also know what is not in the book," Evans said. "Otherwise, he might make a ruling that contradicts an existing rule."

During Evans' professional career, he encountered the elastic clause every two or three years. Those odd happenings were usually put into the interpretation manual the following year, but not every play or situation that occurred found its way into the official rules.

According to Evans, an example of a 9.01 (c) situation is the rule stipulation of the penalty of a one-base award when a player uses detached equipment to touch a pitched ball. There has always been a provision for a batted ball (three bases) and a thrown ball (two bases), but no provision for a pitched ball. When they encountered that situation, umpires invoked the elastic clause and awarded one base. After that, it was explained in the interpretation manual, but did not make it into the rulebook until recently.

A glaring misuse of the elastic clause, for example, would be to award three bases for a batted ball that goes beyond a very deep fence. "He would have easily had a triple," claimed the prep umpire who actually did that several years ago.

A rare use of the elastic clause at the major league level was made in an April 2007 game between Cleveland and Baltimore. In the top of the third inning, with runners on first and third and one out, Baltimore's Ramon Hernandez sent a liner to center field. Grady Sizemore made a sprawling catch and threw to first to get Miguel Tejada for the inning-ending double play. Before Tejada was put out, however, Nick Markakis tagged up and scored from third.

The run should have counted. The play was a time play and not a force play. However, plate umpire Marvin Hudson waved the run off without protest from the Baltimore bench. In the bottom of the sixth, crew chief Ed Montague called the press box and told the official scorer to give Baltimore another run. Montague's decision gave Baltimore a 3-2 lead in a game it eventually won, 7-4.

Although the decision to count the run did not affect the outcome of the game, the Indians contended that Baltimore lost its chance to get the run back when it did not protest the cancellation of Markakis' run before Erik Bedard threw his first pitch in the bottom of the third inning.

Montague's report of the incident made it clear that the umpires corrected the mistake in the interest of "getting it right" without an inquiry from the Orioles. In fact, that situation is not an appeal play, but simply the correction of an error. MLB's statement said, "Mindful of (the umpires') obligation that the first requisite is to get decisions correct, as the rules instruct them, this umpire crew was within the authority that Rule 9.01 (c) gave them to correct the game score when they did."

The umpires were not covered by the "next pitch" rule, since there is no rule that states an umpire's mistake must be corrected by the next pitch. That is an example of how 9.01 (c) can be correctly used.

Sometimes situations occur and umpires would like to use the "elastic clause" to cover up a mistake, but that's not proper. Take an example from a playoff game in Colorado in which an unusual situation occurred due to a different type of umpire error.

## DID YOU KNOW?

George Drouches is the fourth man to serve as the national umpiring coordinator for the NCAA. The previous coordinators were Jon Bible (1990-96); Dave Yeast (1996-2009); and Gene McArtor (2009-14).

## BY THE NUMBERS

6

Number of MLB umpires who list their home state as Arizona.

3

Members of Ted Barrett's crew who hail from Arizona (Barrett, Higley; Alfonso Marquez, Gilbert; and Paul Schrieber, Scottsdale.)

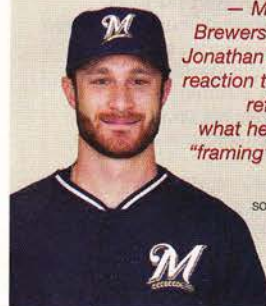
## QUICKTIP

Umpires want to "get the call right." And, today, more than ever, we are willing to consult with our partners in order to do just that. However, **the best way you can accomplish that is by working as hard as possible to get your plays right in the first place.** If you judge all of your plays, to the best of your ability, it will limit the times when you need to ask for help. Don't make a habit of asking for help on every close play. Call all that you can for yourself, accept missed calls and know the circumstances under which the rules prohibit you from changing a call.

## THEY SAID IT

"It's receiving. Framing is what a high schooler does to try to trick the ump. I'm just receiving it as still as possible and giving the ump a good look."

— Milwaukee Brewers' catcher Jonathan Lucroy's reaction to people referring to what he does as "framing" a pitch.



SOURCE: SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

## TEST YOURSELF

In each of the following, you are given a situation and at least two possible answers. Decide which answer or answers are correct for NFHS, NCAA and pro rules, which may vary. **Solutions: p. 81.**

1. R1 is on first and attempting to steal on the pitch. F8 makes a shoestring catch of B3's liner. F8's throw goes into the dugout. R1 was two steps from second when F8 released the throw and between second and third when the throw entered dead-ball territory.

a. If R1 was attempting to return to first base, allow him the chance to retouch.

b. R1 must retouch second before proceeding back to first.

c. Since R1 had not retouched second before the ball went into dead-ball territory, he may not legally retouch first base.

d. With no attempt to retouch second and first legally, R1 may be called out on appeal.

e. R1 is awarded third.

f. R1 is awarded home.

2. With R1 on first and R3 on third, B8 hits a ground ball between first and second. F3, who is playing in front of R1, dives to his right, but cannot make the play. The ball strikes R1, who is past F3. F4 is playing at "double-play depth," and has no play on the ball. R3 advances to home, R1 ends up at second and B8 at first.

a. The ball is dead when it hits R1.

b. R3 scores.

c. R3 returns to third.

d. R1 is out.

e. R1 must stay at first.

f. R1 may stay at second.

g. B8 may stay at first base.

3. R1 is on first and R3 is on third with two outs. R3 gets in a rundown between third and home and R3 is obstructed. R1 legally advances to second after the obstruction and starts toward third. As R3 retreats toward third, the defense retires R1 for the third out.

a. The umpires correctly leave the ball live.

b. Play should have been stopped when obstruction occurred.

c. R1 is awarded second.

d. R1's out stands.

e. R3 is awarded home.

f. R3 does not score since he didn't touch the plate before the third out.

g. R3 scores. His award supersedes the third out since obstruction happened first.

The three-umpire crew was assigned to a field it had not worked before and none of the umpires walked the perimeter to familiarize themselves with the field. The outfield fence was a single fence that varied in height. At the right-field foul pole, the fence was four feet high and in right center it abruptly rose to eight feet to protect a tennis court.

From the plate area, the eight-foot portion could conceivably be viewed as two fences. Since it was only one fence, a batted ball has to clear the fence to be a home run. Any ball hitting the fence remains in play. That was discussed as part of the ground rules in the pregame conference. However, the first-base umpire apparently misunderstood the explanation.

And of course, it came into play. With a runner on first, a batted ball hit just under the top of the highest fence and bounced back. The home team's right fielder knew the ball was in play and reacted accordingly. The first-base umpire, who correctly went out to observe the "trouble" ball, signaled home run. Both R1 and the batter-

runner saw that home run signal and began to trot. The ball was relayed home and R1 was tagged out after a rundown between home and third. The batter-runner ended up on third.

The umpires conferred and decided to let the out stand. Most surprisingly, no one was ejected. The exact discussion that took place is unknown, but the first-base umpire later stated, "I signaled the home run, but did not kill the ball."

The umpires could have applied 10-2-3L, which allows umpires to rectify their own mistakes when a runner is placed in jeopardy, but chose not to do so. Since there is rule coverage for fixing an umpire's mistake, the elastic clause would not apply. Because the rule does not state how a situation should be rectified specifically, one could argue that the elastic clause would be used in making the base awards.

*George Demetriou is a resident of Colorado Springs. He is a former president and is the current rule interpreter for the Colorado High School Baseball Umpires Association. □*

## Keep Plate Meeting Short, to the Point

By John Coons

**H**ow many times has your plate meeting with the head coaches seemed to be difficult to understand?

The plate meeting is a simple but yet very important aspect in umpiring. The purpose is to establish the ground rules to be used during the game or series. The usual procedure is to have the home team head coach explain the ground rules on the first game of the series. If a crew (or umpire) has been to the stadium or field before or if the game is being played at a neutral site, the plate umpire or crew chief can give the ground rules.

There is a specific procedure that should be used when going through

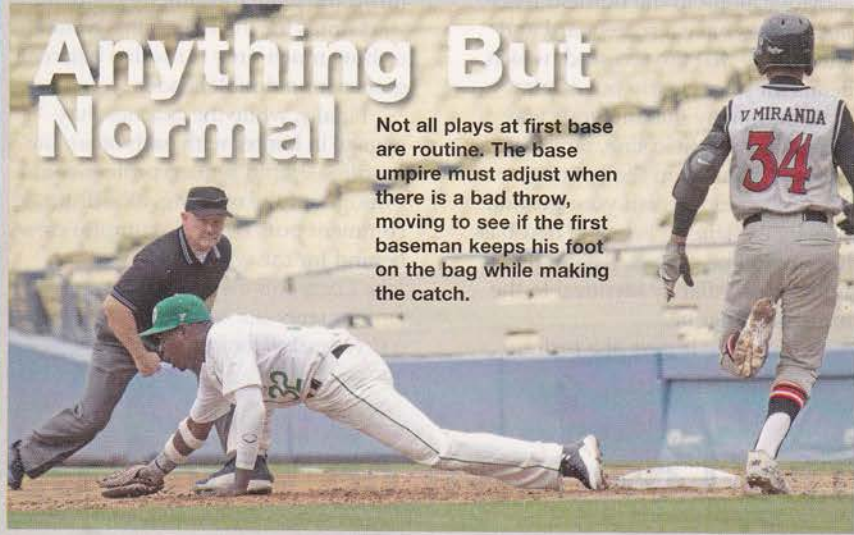
the ground rules. Start with the backstop. Most fields' backstops have no breaks (backstop is straight and vertical) and played as live should a thrown ball hit the screen.

Next, cover the third-base dugout. Things to consider are the top step of the dugout, the facing or padding of the dugout and any chalked dead-ball lines. Continue moving down the left-field line, which may include a tarp or bullpen. Most tarp rules allow players to lean on the tarp but do not allow the player to elevate. In other words, keep the players' spikes off the tarp. If the bullpens are located within the field, determine if they are considered live-ball territory. Also, determine how a ball is played should it enter the bullpen.



# Anything But Normal

Not all plays at first base are routine. The base umpire must adjust when there is a bad throw, moving to see if the first baseman keeps his foot on the bag while making the catch.



## Read, Read Step and Lean

Umpire Bill Berger, Ventura, Calif., reads that the throw was offline and takes a read step with his left foot toward the foul line. Additionally, he leans to see the first baseman has pulled his foot off the bag.



## Who's on First First?

Berger stays with the play, watching the runner cross the base and seeing the first baseman's heel return to the bag. Who touched the bag first?



## Sell the Call

After calling the runner safe, Berger makes a sweeping motion to indicate the first baseman was off the bag at the time the runner crossed the base. Had the call been an out, Berger could have aggressively pointed to the bag, saying, "He's on the bag!" before calling the out.

CASEPLAYS

**Dead-Ball Appeal**

**Play:** With R2 on second and R3 on third and no outs, B7 flies out to right field. Both runners retouch and advance, however R3 leaves early. Once the ball is returned to the infield, the offensive coach requests time to talk to R2 at third base. Meanwhile, the defensive coach yells, "Appeal third base, the runner left too soon." **Ruling:** In NFHS, a dead-ball is permitted, so once time is granted, the defensive coach's appeal should be ruled upon (8-2-6c). In NCAA and pro, an appeal can be made only once the plate umpire has properly made the ball live (NCAA 8-6b; pro 7.10).

**Is That a Strike?**

**Play:** With R1 on first, B7 holds the bat over the plate as if to bunt, but does not move it. The pitch is outside the strike zone. **Ruling:** In all three codes, that is not a strike. In NFHS and pro, the batter must make an attempt to hit the ball (NFHS 7-2-1b, 7.2.1B; pro 2.00-strike[a]). In NCAA, it is a strike if the barrel head of the bat passes the batter's front hip. That does not apply if the batter attempted to pull the bat back on the bunt attempt (2-38 AR).

**Ball Four, Balk**

**Play:** With a full count on B8 and R2 on second base, F1 fails to set and delivers ball four. **Ruling:** In NFHS, the ball is immediately dead. The pitch doesn't count, R2 is awarded third and B8 remains at the plate with a full count. In NCAA and pro, the pitch counts only if R2 is stealing on the play and is not thrown out. B8 is awarded first and R2 is awarded third. Otherwise, the ruling is the same as in NFHS (NCAA 9-3 Pen. 1; pro 8.05 Pen. AR).

**Very Late Swing**

**Play:** R1 is attempting to steal second. The pitch to B3 is in the dirt, so B3 does not swing immediately. However, once the ball is past him, B3 waves the bat at the ball. **Ruling:** If the ball is clearly past, the batter cannot be charged with a strike. However, he can be charged with interference if he hinders F2's attempt to throw the ball (NFHS 7-3-5c; NCAA 7-11f; pro 6.06c).

Move along to the outfield fence. Most places have a scoreboard and batter's eye that are recessed, which means they are clearly out of play.

Continue by making your way down the right-field line, which should be similar to the opposite side of the field. Finish your ground rules by explaining how the first-base dugout will be played. Again, that should be similar or identical to the third-base dugout.

If the game is part of a series,

finish the plate meeting by confirming start times for the remaining games or how much time is needed between games for a doubleheader.

Finally, while the coaches may engage in banter with each other, the umpires should remain professional throughout the meeting. One ill-timed comment puts the entire umpire crew behind for the weekend.

*John Coons was a minor league umpire for nine years and has umpired Division I college baseball for four years. □*

# The Lowdown on Who's Up

By Jay Miner

The late Nick Bremigan, former major league umpire and umpire school instructor, devised a simplified batting out of order system for umpires to follow. Essentially, he broke down the wordy rule into three courses of action for the umpire:

**Batting out of order discovered too soon.** That happens when the defensive team appeals batting out of order while the wrong batter is still at bat. In that case there is no penalty. The proper batter is simply brought to the plate and assumes the improper batter's count.

**Batting out of order discovered at the right time.** That occurs when batting out of order is appealed immediately after the improper batter completes his turn at bat and before the next pitch. In that case, the proper batter is declared out and the next batter is the batter who follows the player just called out.

**Batting out of order discovered too late.** That happens when a batting-out-of-turn appeal is made following the first pitch to the next batter. That pitch legalizes the improper batter. In that situation, no one is called out and the proper batter is the player who follows the legalized improper batter in the order.

When batting out of order is discovered at the right time in NCAA and pro, the proper batter is out and other runners are returned to the bases occupied at the time of the pitch. The

improper batter, if on base, is removed from base and any outs made by ordinary play are canceled.

In NFHS, outs made by ordinary play stand after batting out of order is penalized except any out made by the improper batter is superseded by the out declared for batting out of order.

**Play 1:** R2 is on second and R1 on first with no outs. It is B3's turn to bat but B4 erroneously bats and hits a ground ball to F5. F5 steps on third to force out R2 and fires to F4 at second to force out R1. B4 is safe at first. The defensive team then appeals batting out of order. **Ruling 1:** In NCAA and pro, B3, the batter who should have batted, is declared out. The outs on R2 and R1 are nullified and they are returned to their original bases. B4 is removed from base and returns to the plate as the proper batter. In NFHS, it's a triple play. The outs on R2 and R1 stand and B3 is declared out for failing to bat in proper order. B4 will lead off the next inning (NFHS 7-1-1, 7-1-2; NCAA 7-11a; pro 6.07).

**Play 2:** The batting order is Abel, Baker, Charles, Daniel, Edward, Frank, etc. It is Abel's turn to bat but Charles bats and hits a double. Abel then comes to bat and strikes out. Baker follows and also strikes out. It is now Charles turn to bat, but Charles is on second base. What's the ruling?

**Ruling 2:** Charles is left on second base, skipped over in the batting order and the proper batter is Daniels.

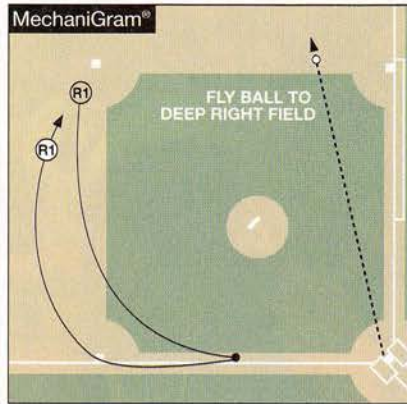
*Jay Miner is a veteran umpire and baseball historian from Albany, N.Y. □*

# Bye Bye, Last Time By

Under the rule known as “last time by,” a runner gets a chance to correct his error. If the runner retouches a base or bases while advancing to an awarded base or returning to the original base occupied at the time of the pitch, his failure to touch a base while returning is corrected under the theory that touching the base the last time by corrects any previous error (NFHS 8-2-6L, 8.2.6H; NCAA 2-51; pro interp, PBUC 6.12 play 7).

Although the rule can be considered runner-friendly, there are limits to how much protection a runner may receive.

In the MechaniGram, R1 misses third on his way home on a fly ball to right field. R1 attempts to



circumvent the rule by taking an extreme shortcut to third. Even though he touches third on his way back to second, R1 is subject to being called out on appeal. □

# Helmets Put a Lid on Injuries

By Jeffrey Stern

On Aug. 16, 1920, Cleveland shortstop Ray Chapman was killed when he was hit in the temple by a pitch thrown by the Yankees' Carl Mays. But it was 37 years before either major league addressed the issue of protective headgear.

The AL ordered players to wear protective headgear starting with the 1957 season. Players were given the option of wearing helmets or plastic inserts inside their caps. Most players, trading the appearance of machismo over the protection offered by a helmet, chose the inserts. Helmets became mandatory in NFHS and NCAA rules in 1973.

Helmets with earflaps on the side of the helmet facing the pitcher didn't become prevalent until after Aug. 18, 1967, when perhaps the most famous beanball was thrown. California Angels pitcher Jack Hamilton threw a pitch that hit young Boston Red Sox star Tony Conigliaro on the left

cheekbone. Conigliaro was knocked unconscious and was carried off the field on a stretcher. He was taken to Santa Maria Hospital in Cambridge, Mass., where it was determined he had suffered a fractured cheekbone, a dislocated jaw and a damaged retina.

Rule 1.16 in the *Official Baseball Rules* provides not only the regulations but some of the history regarding batting helmets. Players are required to “use some type of protective helmet” while at bat. Those who were active in the 1982 season and recorded their objection to wearing a helmet with an earflap were allowed to wear a head cover only.

In 2007, Tulsa Drillers first-base coach Mike Coolbaugh was struck in the neck by a line drive and subsequently died. Shortly thereafter, coaches on the baselines were required to wear helmets. Earflaps are not required.

Jeffrey Stern, Referee senior editor, is a veteran high school umpire. □

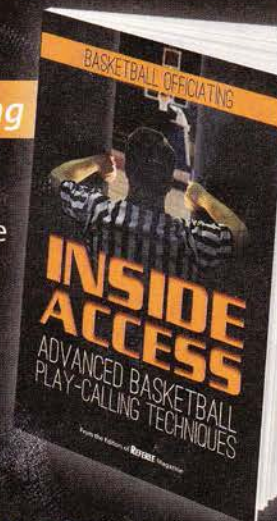
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