



Replay A Game Due To An Official's Mistake?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“In a baseball game for 12-year-olds with teen umpires, a runner slides headfirst into home and is called safe. The opposing coach argues the league has a ‘no head first slide policy’ but cannot produce a copy of the rule. The umpires change their call to ‘out.’ Later, the same player slides headfirst into home again, and the umps automatically call him out for a headfirst slide. That runner’s team loses by one run. That night, the coaches learn there is no rule against headfirst slides. The coach who erroneously challenged the umps admits his mistake and says the opponent should get the win. What is your take – the game stands, change the winner, or replay the game?”

PCA Response by Joe Scally, PCA Trainer–Chicago

In 1990 game officials mistakenly gave the University of Colorado football team an extra down, allowing Colorado to score a touchdown on the extra play to defeat the University of Missouri. Even though replay revealed the mistake, the result stood and Colorado eventually won a share of the National Championship. In a lesser known Fifth-Down Game in 1940, Cornell was given an extra down, defeated Dartmouth, then offered to forfeit the game, which Dartmouth accepted, ending Cornell’s 18-game winning streak.

There may be no “right” answer as to the best solution, as we examine issues of fairness, finality of decisions, acceptance of results, and who gets to decide the outcome. These are life-lesson types of issues youth will later face in law, politics, business, education and many other facets of our society.

What is most important is not which team gets the official W, but which life lessons are learned by the players, coaches and umpires. The coaches should consider what they could have done differently, and they are responsible for making sure that these lessons (among others) are thoroughly explored with the players and youth umpires: the importance of knowing, understanding and following the rules; that officials of all ages and experience levels make mistakes; that sometimes those mistakes are in your favor and sometimes they are not; that we must continue to play our best, regardless; that any questioning of calls must be done respectfully, following proper procedure; that results on the scoreboard are not always “fair”; and that no matter what the scoreboard says, those who have given their best are winners.

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Regarding how to handle the actual result, the first step is to follow league rules relating to protesting an umpire's decision. If there are no rules, then the decision becomes arbitrary (and it would be a good time to put some rules in place). In the absence of clear rule, the possible arguments are:

- **The outcome on the field, mistakes and all, should stand, as mistakes are made in every game, and we can't and shouldn't review all of them;**
- **The losing team clearly would have won except for the umpires' mistake, so changing the result is the only fair outcome;**
- **Since we can't be certain how the incorrect ruling affected the game, it should be replayed from the point of the disputed call.**

Other factors to consider are how letting coaches influence this game's outcome will affect the future authority of umpires, and how a change in the results will affect other teams in the league.

Whatever the league decides, it is critical to emphasize to players and parents that the decision is important not because of who officially "wins" but because the decision indicates the principles of good sportsmanship and other values that the league hopes to impart.

Joe Scally is a PCA Trainer and longtime soccer coach based in the Chicago area. Joe spent several years as PCA's national director of training.

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