Batting Out of Turn (BOOT): The Most Confounding Rule

Mark Pankin

SABR 49

June 28, 2019

San Diego, CA

Notes provide additional information and were reminders during the presentation. They are not supposed to be anything close to a complete text of the presentation or thorough discussion of the subject.
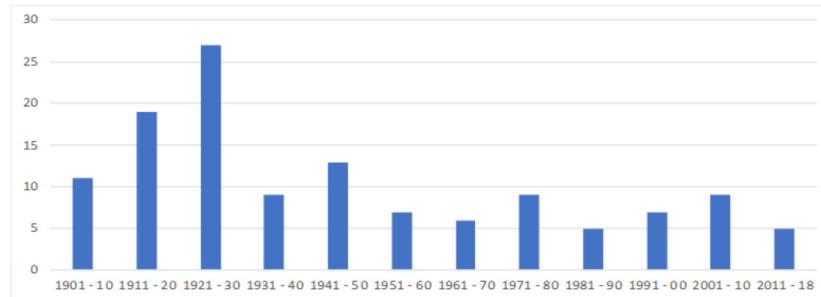
Use Acrobat Reader's ability to enlarge what appears on the screen if you have trouble reading a graph or table.

Why is it confusing?

- BOOT Rule is not very complicated, but it has a couple of wrinkles
- Has been misunderstood or misapplied by
  - Players
  - Managers
  - Umpires
  - A league president!
- Poorly worded before 1957
- Occurs infrequently

BOOTs by decade, 1901-2018

- Fewer than one a year since 1951
- Ones shown on Retrosheet web site
- More keep being discovered

Most recent one was May 9, 2018.

Retrosheet BOOT page:
https://www.retrosheet.org/outturn.htm

Some are technically not BOOTs, but have similar
characteristics (see web page for details).

Some causes

- Manager changes his mind just before game and fails to post changed lineup card in dugout
- Lineup on scoreboard is not right
- Players are used to batting in a certain order, but it is changed
- Confusion after double switch
- "Faux" double switch
- Batter who makes last out of an inning forgets and comes up to start next inning

Faux double switch has happened when there was a pinch hitter (for the pitcher) who reached base and was run for. The pinch runner stays in the game and goes to the field. If he bats in the spot of the replaced fielder rather than the one where he pinch ran, it is a BOOT.

HP ump will assume that players coming into the game bat in the same spot as the positions of the ones they replaced or moved to the position unless the manager goes out and tells the ump what the new batting order is. Players coming into the game may not realize there was a double switch and will come up out of order unless the manager or the coach tells them not to.

Current Rule (6.07)

- Adopted in 1957
- Covers all possibilities with many examples
- Prior versions poorly worded and not complete
- Before game each team gives its lineup to the home plate ump and a copy to the other team
- Will use the term "proper" batter (as in rule) for the one who should be hitting

Improper batter (1)

- Umpire and official scorer will NOT point it out
- Team can replace with proper batter before plate appearance is finished
  - No penalty
  - Proper batter inherits the count on the improper batter
- What can happen if improper batter completes his plate appearance?

Official scorer does not get a copy of the lineup given to the umpire and other team, so may not know if an improper batter comes up.

Improper batter (2)

- Basic rule:
- If BOOT is called, play is nullified, proper batter is out, next in lineup after proper one bats
- If BOOT play is accepted, lineup position resets and proper next batter is the one who follows the improper one in the lineup

Improper batter (3)

- It is up to team in field to appeal the BOOT
- If appeal is made and BOOT is enforced:
    - PROPER batter is called out (scored C unassisted)
    - Any runners return to bases before the play
    - Advancement (SB, WP, PB) before play stands
    - One common mistake: improper batter is called out
- Team will usually appeal when batter reaches base or scores a runner
- That may not be the best thing to do

Will see some examples of when it would be better to let the improper batter reach base.

Improper batter (4)

- Team may accept the play
  - usually when improper batter makes an out
  - may be times when should accept batter reaching
- If play is accepted, proper next batter is the <u>one who follows the improper one in the lineup</u>
- Possible confusion: who should bat next
- Some batter(s) may be skipped
- A batter might come up soon for a second time in an inning
- Can appeal in a later inning if same BOOT

Strange things can happen due to lineup position being reset. One or more batters may come up more often than normal and others may miss a turn at the plate.

It is possible that batter due up is on base. In such a case, his turn at bat is skipped and the next player in the order bats. (Don't know if this has ever happened or how it was dealt with, such as a courtesy runner.)

Contrived example of how a player could get two hits in an inning due to a BOOT. Assume the pitcher is not batting ninth (DH or sometimes in NL game) and manager interchanges the "normal" #2 and #9 hitters. Lead off batter hits a homer and normal #2 batting #9 in the lineup comes up and makes an out. Team in field does not appeal and team batting realizes what has happened. So #1 hitter is now the proper batter and comes up and gets a hit.

Earlier versions of rule (1)

- Original rule in 1876:
- Any batsman failing to take his position at the bat in his order of striking--unless by reason of illness or injury, or by consent of the captains of the opposing nines--shall be declared out, unless the error is discovered before a fair ball has been struck, or the striker put out.
- Proper batter is the one out
- Improper batter can be replaced before plate appearance is finished

Substitutions were not allowed in original rules except as shown in the rule.

Earlier versions of rule (2)

- Revision in 1895:
- The batsman is out if he fails to take his position at the bat in his order of batting, unless the error be discovered and the proper batsman takes his position before a time "at bat" recorded; and in such case the balls and strikes called must be counted in the time "at bat" of the proper batsman, and only the proper batsman shall be declared out: Provided, this rule shall not take effect unless the out is declared before the ball is delivered to the succeeding batsman, and no runs shall be scored or bases run, and further, and no outs shall be counted other than that of the proper batsman.

Adds that proper batter may come up with inherited ball-strike count.

Adds that appeal or out on BOOT must be made before next at bat starts

Only one out on an enforced BOOT. So if the improper batter or a runner is out on the play (and an appeal would be desirable if a run scored on the play), those outs do not count since the play is completely nullified.

English teachers' nightmare. Rule against using more than one sentence?!

Earlier versions of rule (3)

- Revision in 1898:
- Adds "Should the batsman declared out by this rule be sufficient to retire the side, the proper batsman the next inning is the player who would have come to bat had the players been out by ordinary play."
- Possibly confusing, but implies batter in lineup who follows one called out comes up next

Earlier versions of rule (4)

- Do not specify mechanics of the appeal
  - Can umpire enforce it without other team's appeal?
  - 1876 rule does not say it must be before first pitch to next batter
- Do not fully say who proper next batter is if play is accepted and rule is not applied
- 1957 rule codified the understandings that had developed over the years

Dumbest appeal?

- LAN at PHI, 5/4/1980, first inning, runners on first and second, one out
- Ron Cey (#5) is due up, Dusty Baker (#6) bats
- Hits into a force out a second, but Dallas Green points out the BOOT
- Cey is called out and Baker hits 3-run homer
- Green claimed both force and Cey out count
- Argues, is ejected, protests game (denied)
- Dodgers win 12-10

If Green accepts the Baker play, only good things can happen:

1) If Cey comes up to hit next, the BOOT protects against most anything bad (runner scores on WP, PB could happen) and will result in the third out.

2) Proper next batter is Bill Russell, who is not nearly as dangerous a hitter as Baker if Dodgers figure out what happened.

3) May be able to appeal a BOOT later in game if the two continue to bat in the reverse order.

McCarver is too clever

- ATL at PHI, 6/9/1972
- Marty Perez (#8) makes last out in top of sixth, but comes up to lead off the seventh
- After first pitch, McCarver points out BOOT
- Braves send of pinch hitter for pitcher with 1-0 count
- If Perez makes an out, Braves likely send up pinch hitter for pitcher next—proper batter—so getting to top of the order is delayed by a batter

Phillies sent seven batters to the plate, including a pinch hitter, in the bottom of the sixth and scored two runs to tie the game. If it was a long and hard inning, Perez may have forgotten he made the last out in the top of the inning.

Most confusion ever (1)

- DET at PHA, 5/24/1945
- In prior games and on scoreboard, A's had George Kell bat 5th, Irv Hall 6th
- In this game they were reversed
- With one out bases empty in second, Kell (improper) Ks, so Tigers don't protest
- Hall singles and Tigers point out BOOT
- HP ump Ed Rommel rules third out of inning

Newspaper showing likely lineup had Kell #5, Hall #6.

Tigers should have accepted Hall's single since it is almost certain the #7 hitter would come up next, but Kell would be the proper hitter. So there would be virtually no risk to letting the #7 hit (only if somehow Hall managed to score before the batter's play). Likely that Kell and Hall would BOOT in later innings, so the appeal could be saved for a more valuable use.

In general, with two outs, it will be better not to appeal a BOOT (as in the Dodgers-Phillies game) unless a run scored on the play.

Most confusion ever (2)

- Not clear who was called out, but apparently it was Hall
- #7 hitter, Dick Siebert should have been out with #8 hitter Frankie Hayes leading off third
- After conferring with umpires, managers, Rommel rules that Kell leads off third (consistent will Hall being ruled out)!
- All 3 had been umps since 1938
- Both managers say that is wrong and issue protests of the game

Even experienced umpires are not always understanding the BOOT rule. The two base umpires, George Pipgras and Bill Grieve had each been in a game with a BOOT, but not HP ump Rommel.

Most confusion ever (3)

- A's win game 7-2, so Connie Mack withdraws his protest
- Rommel says after game that he made a mistake having Kell lead off without providing details
- AL president Will Harridge denies protest
  - says Rommel was wrong to have Kell lead off
  - says Tigers had to appeal before Hall was pitched to (even if it not in team's interest to point out Kell)
  - Nothing in rule says that

Kell made an out, but A's scored a run in the inning.

Protest should have been upheld once it is agreed that wrong batter led off inning.

Other reason is irrelevant as well as being incorrect.

Most confusion ever (4)

- *Sporting News* story before Harridge's ruling asks several "experts" who should have led off
- About half incorrectly say Siebert (#7 hitter)
- Tigers manager Steve O'Neill thought that
- About half had it correct
- Tigers won pennant and World Series that year, so not having loss wiped out did not hurt much
- Article in *Baseball Research Journal*, Spring 2013 (Vol. 42, No. 1)

I wrote about this game in that article. There were some other interesting aspects and occurrences in it.

When not to appeal

- It may be better to let improper batter get on
- Most likely with two outs
- Example in game with pitcher batting 9th
    - 2 outs in second inning with nobody on
    - #7 comes up in #6 spot and reaches base
    - If #6 hitter comes up next, he is BOOT since #8 is now proper hitter, so no risk letting #6 hit
    - If #6 gets on, appeal so #8 is out, pitcher starts 3rd
    - If #6 makes out ending inning, most likely #8 comes up to start third, but is BOOT since #7 is proper

Since BOOTs are so infrequent, will a manager/bench coach/analytics department will spend time trying to figure these out or actually apply one? Earl Weaver did based on what he did and didn't do in 5/28/69, BAL @ SEA. Pilots changed their lineup quite a bit after giving the card to the umpire. Weaver did not point out the (many) prior BOOTs until the fifth inning when he could get runs (two) taken off the board. Too complicated to discuss in the talk.

If #6 gets on and no appeal (since other runner did not score), #7 is proper hitter, but is on base. So #8 becomes proper hitter, and he likely would come up. So need to appeal.

BOOT is an important strategic advantage for the other team. Can "keep" in its pocket for use later in the game if it looks like it will be repeated as Weaver did.

Web sites, e-mail

https://www.retrosheet.org/outturn.htm
  has list of BOOTs, some are amazing

www.pankin.com/baseball.htm

E-mail: sabr --ATsign-- pankin.com

Plan to post slides, notes on my web site
  and on Retrosheet.org Research page

My baseball page focuses on the mathematical Markov model and its applications, the most "famous" of which is optimizing the batting order.

Replace --ATsign-- with @