



Subject: Balks

In this paper we will look at the definitions of a balk and the NFHS and NCAA rules governing a balk

High School (NFHS)

DEFINITION

An illegal act committed by the pitcher with a runner(s) on base which entitles each runner to advance one base.

RULE

ART. 4 . . . Balk. If there is a runner or runners, any of the following acts by a pitcher while he is touching the pitcher's plate is a balk:

- a. any feinting toward the batter or first base, or any dropping of the ball (even though accidental) and the ball does not cross a foul line (6-1-4);
- b. failing to step with the non-pivot foot directly toward a base (occupied or unoccupied) when throwing or feinting there in an attempt to put out, or drive back a runner; or throwing or feinting to any unoccupied base when it is not an attempt to put out or drive back a runner;
- c. making an illegal pitch from any position (6-1, 6-2-1a-d);
- d. failing to pitch to the batter in a continuous motion immediately after any movement of any part of the body such as he habitually uses in his delivery;
- e. If the pitcher, with a runner on base, stops or hesitates in his delivery because the batter steps out of the box (a) with one foot or (b) with both feet or (c) holds up his hand to request "Time," it shall not be a balk. In (a) and (c), there is no penalty on either the batter or the pitcher. The umpire shall call "Time" and begin play anew. In (b), a strike shall be called on the batter for violation of 7-3-1. In (a), (b) and (c), if the pitcher legally delivers the ball, it shall be called a strike and the ball remains live. Thus, two strikes are called on the batter in (b). If the umpire judges the batter's action to be a deliberate attempt to create a balk, he will penalize according to 3-3-1n.
- f. taking a hand off the ball while in a set position (6-1-3), unless he pitches to the batter or throws to a base or he steps toward and feints a throw to second or third base as in (b); or
- g. failing to pitch to the batter when the entire non-pivot foot passes behind the perpendicular plane of the back edge of the pitcher's plate, except when feinting or throwing to second base in an attempt to put out a runner.

ART. 5 . . . It is also a balk if a runner or runners are on base and the pitcher, while he is not touching the pitcher's plate, makes any movement naturally associated with his pitch, or he places his feet on or astride the pitcher's plate, or positions himself within approximately five feet of the pitcher's plate without having the ball.

NCAA

DEFINITION

SECTION 3. An illegal act by the pitcher with a runner or runners on base entitling all runners to advance one base (see 9-3).

RULE

SECTION 3. If there is a runner or runners, a balk shall be called for the following action by a pitcher:

- a. While touching the pitcher's plate, any feinting motion without completing the throw toward the batter or toward first or third base.
- b. When, before throwing to any base from a pitching position, the pitcher feints a throw to a base and, without breaking contact with the pitching plate, throws to another base;



c. While in a pitching position, throw to any base in an attempt to retire a runner without first stepping directly toward such base; or throw or feint a throw toward any base when it is not an attempt to retire a runner or prevent the runner from advancing;

1) The pitcher, while touching the pitcher's plate, must step toward the base, preceding or simultaneous with any move toward that base. The pitcher is committed, upon raising the lead leg, to throw to the base being faced, to second base or to the plate. When throwing or feinting a throw to a base not being faced, the pitcher must step immediately, directly and gain ground toward that base.

Note: If the pitcher throws to the first or third base player who is playing off the base, a balk shall not be called if the fielder moves toward the occupied base in an attempt to retire the runner.

2) The "spin" or "open" move to second base is legal if the pitcher raises the lead leg and immediately, with a continuous motion, steps directly toward second base. The pitcher need not throw.

3) The pitcher shall step "ahead of the throw." A snap throw followed by a step directly toward the base is a balk.

4) The pitcher may not prematurely flex either leg before stepping directly and throwing to first base.

5) The jump-turn move is legal if the pitcher's free foot steps toward and gains ground to the base that the ball is being thrown. Otherwise, a balk shall be called.

6) Stepping toward second base without completing the throw is legal if the base is occupied by a runner or there is an attempt to retire a runner.

d. Making an illegal pitch, such as a quick pitch;

Note: If a runner on third base breaks for home plate, the pitcher may speed up the delivery but must continue to use a normal pitching sequence and arm action.

e. Unnecessarily delaying the game;

f. While not in possession of the ball, the pitcher stands with either foot or both feet on any part of the dirt area (circle) of the mound during a hidden-ball-play attempt;

g. Failing to throw to the batter immediately after making any motion with any part of the body such as the pitcher habitually uses in the delivery;

Note: If the pitcher stops or hesitates the delivery or throws the ball in a manner that the umpire judges is clearly not intended to be a pitch to the batter (such as a ball thrown into the ground or dropped) because the batter steps out of the box, holds up their hand or uses any other action if calling time, it shall not be a balk if runners are on base or an illegal pitch with no runners. The umpire shall call "Time," reset and resume play.

h. The pitcher takes either hand off the ball after having taken a stretch or set position unless making a pitch or throwing to any base;

Note: The pitcher may momentarily adjust the ball in the glove and separate the hands as long as it is prior to assuming a legal pitching position.

i. The pitcher pitches while the catcher is not in the catcher's box. The catcher must have at least one foot within the catcher's box until the pitcher begins the pitching motion;

Note: This is an illegal pitch with no runners on base.

j. The pitcher delivers the pitch from the set position without coming to a complete and discernible stop, or the pitcher comes to more than one stop from the set position (see 9-1-b);

Note: With the bases unoccupied, the pitcher does not need to come to a complete and discernible stop.

k. From the windup position, the pitcher makes more than two pumping motions with their arms before delivering to the plate;

l. From the set position, if the entire free foot or any part of the stride leg breaks the plane of the back edge of the pitcher's plate and the pitcher does not throw or feint a motion to second base or pitch to home plate (see 9-1-b-3); and



m. When the pitcher makes a natural pitching motion while not touching the pitcher's plate.

PENALTY for a. through m.—Balk. The ball becomes dead and each runner must advance one base.

1) If the balk immediately is followed by a pitch that permits the batter and each runner to advance a minimum of one base, the balk is ignored and the ball remains live.

Example: The batter and all runner(s) advance when a wild pitch is either ball four or strike three.

2) If a balk immediately is followed by a wild throw by the pitcher to a base that permits a runner(s) to advance to or beyond the base to which that runner is entitled, the balk shall be acknowledged. The umpire will call the balk in the usual manner, but shall not call “Time” until all play has ceased (runners have stopped trying to advance and/or a fielder is in possession of the ball in the infield).

Note: After a balk that is followed by a base hit or a wild throw to a base or the plate, a runner who misses the first base to which the runner is advancing and who, before the next pitch, is called out on appeal, shall be considered as having advanced one base for the purpose of this rule.

3) If only the runner advances to or beyond the base to which they are entitled because of a wild pitch after a balk, the balk is still acknowledged.

Note 1: A runner(s) may advance beyond the base that is entitled at the runner's own risk.

Note 2: When a balk occurs, the pitch is nullified and the batter will resume the at-bat with the count that existed unless:

- a) The wild pitch was ball four on which all runners (including the batter-runner) advanced one base.
- b) The wild pitch was strike three on which the batter and all other runners advanced one base.

In both situations (a) and (b) above, play proceeds without reference to the balk, because all runners (including the batter-runner) advanced one base on the pitch after the balk.

Note 3: If the balk is followed by a wild pitch that allows a runner to attempt to go beyond the base that they would have been awarded because of the balk, the runner advances at their own risk; they are either safe or out as a result of the play. The balk is still “acknowledged” as it relates to the batter and they will resume the at-bat with the count that existed when the balk occurred.

13 Examples of a Balk

Following are summaries of the thirteen sections of 6.02(a), along with brief commentaries.

(1) The pitcher, while touching the plate, makes any motion naturally associated with the pitch and fails to make such delivery;

COMMENT: If the pitcher starts to come set and stops (regardless of duration) and then moves again to set again, it is a balk

(2) The pitcher, while touching the plate, feints a throw to first base or third base and fails to complete the throw;

COMMENT: The key to getting this call correct is determining whether or not the pitcher is engaged with the pitcher's plate when he feints a throw. If the pitcher steps off the pitcher's plate (to the rear) and then feints a throw, it is not a balk. The field umpire has the best look at the pitcher's pivot foot

(3) The pitcher, while touching the plate, fails to step directly toward a base before throwing to that base;

COMMENT: Pay attention to the wording: pitcher fails to step directly toward a base before throwing to that base. Left-handed pitchers will tend to do one of two things, both of which are a violation:

- Step at a 45-degree angle and throw
- Make a snap throw to first base and then step toward the base

There is nothing in the rule that allows a pitcher to step within a 45-degree angle of first base when making a pickoff attempt. This is a myth!



- (4) The pitcher, while touching the pitchers' plate, throws, or feints a throw, to an unoccupied base, except for the purpose of making a play;

COMMENT: Again, pay attention to the wording. If a pitcher comes set and while still in the set position, the runner attempts to steal, it is legal for the pitcher to throw to the base the runner is advancing to (even though he is not yet at that base) in an attempt to get an out. Remember, the wording states "except for the purpose of making a play." When the pitcher makes the throw, he is making a play.

- (5) The pitcher makes a "quick pitch"; umpires will judge a quick pitch as one delivered before the batter is reasonably set in the batter's box.

COMMENT: What is "reasonably set in the batter's box"? A good rule of thumb is if the batter is looking at the pitcher, he is reasonably set in the batter's box. If the batter is not looking at the pitcher, he is not reasonably set in the batter's box.

- (6) The pitcher delivers the ball to the batter while not facing the batter;

- (7) The pitcher makes any motion naturally associated with the pitch while not touching the pitcher's plate;

COMMENT: Again, pay attention to the pitcher when he has the ball and is on the mound.

- (8) The pitcher unnecessarily delays the game;

COMMENT: What constitutes unnecessarily delaying the game? This is left to the judgement of the umpire. It is important that we are consistent in this area throughout the game

- (9) The pitcher, without having the ball, stands on or astride the pitcher's plate or, while off the plate, feints a pitch;

- (10) The pitcher, while touching the pitcher's plate, accidentally or intentionally drops the ball;

- (11) The pitcher, while giving an intentional base on balls, pitches when the catcher is not in the catcher's box.

PENALTY: The pitch shall be called a ball. If a play follows the illegal pitch the manager of the offense may advise the plate umpire of a decision to decline the illegal pitch penalty and accept the play. Such election shall be made immediately at the end of the play. However, if the batter hits the ball and reaches first base safely, and if all base-runners advance at least one base on the action resulting from the batted ball, the play proceeds without reference to the illegal pitch. NOTE: A batter hit by pitch shall be awarded first base without reference to the illegal pitch.

- (12) The pitcher, after coming to a legal position, removes one hand from the ball other than in an actual pitch, or in throwing to a base;

COMMENT: If a pitcher brings his hands together either in the stretch position or set position and then removes one hand without delivering a pitch or throwing to a base, it is a balk.

- (13) The pitcher delivers the pitch from the set position without coming to a stop.

COMMENT: What constitutes a stop? All body movement must stop and the stop must be discernable. So, what is discernable? Can there be no doubt in the eyes of a coach? If the answer is yes, then the stop is discernable. The key here is paying attention to the pitcher at all times once he has engaged the pitcher's plate

Note: Umpires should bear in mind that the purpose of the balk rule is to prevent the pitcher from deliberately deceiving the base runner. If there is doubt in the umpire's mind, the "intent" of the pitcher should govern.