

# BALKS

## AND OTHER PITCHING INFRACTIONS

### RULE 6 - PITCHING

A pitcher can throw from either of two basic positions - the windup or the set position. Rule 6 explains these positions and what a pitcher can do from each. Rule 6 also explains what a pitcher cannot do. There are 20 infractions listed in Rule 6 that a pitcher can commit, with penalties ranging from a warning to ejection.

**One penalty is a BALK. A balk can only be committed when there are runner(s) on base.**

Some infractions may never or rarely be seen...some occasionally and others more consistently. **It is important that an umpire learns how to use 'preventive officiating' measures so not to make a travesty of the game when dealing with pitching infractions.** Example: A team losing 20-0 brings in a new pitcher who is not a 'pitcher'. Be wise in calling balks...or NOT calling balks.

If a pitcher is borderline when coming 'set'...base umpire may say 'give me a better stop' and if he continues, then call a 'balk'.

DON'T LOOK for trouble. Do not put the pitcher under a magnifying glass...a 'balk' should jump out at you...you should not have to look at the pitcher so intently.

# 20 INFRACTIONS

## A. The following infractions require **CORRECTION** before the next pitch.

1. wearing any items on the hands, wrists or arms that may be distracting to the batter. (umpire has sole authority to judge whether distracting)
2. wearing or placing tape, bandages or other foreign material (other than rosin) on the fingers or palm of his pitching hand that **could** come in contact with the ball
3. wearing a glove/mitt that includes the colors white or gray
4. wearing exposed undershirt sleeves that are white or gray (If the team's uniform is a vest-type jersey, and the undershirt is white or gray...it is LEGAL as long as the undershirt does not go beyond the pitcher's elbow. If the jersey is white or gray and the sleeves extend beyond the pitcher's elbow it is ILLEGAL.)  
Case Book 1.4.2 Sit. A & B

Medical sleeves that extend below the elbow are LEGAL as long as they are not white or gray. A florescent medical sleeve or one with picture, etc...should be deemed distracting and not allowed.

## B. The following infractions are **DEFACING** the ball. The pitcher may be **warned or ejected**. **If such defaced ball is pitched and then detected, it is an illegal pitch; balk or ball.** Rule 6-2-1a-d

5. applying a foreign substance to the ball
6. spitting on the ball or glove
7. rubbing the ball on the glove, clothing or person **if the act** defaces the ball
8. discoloring the ball with dirt

## C. PITCHER GOING TO HIS MOUTH.

9. bringing the pitching hand in contact with the mouth without distinctly wiping off the pitching hand before it touches the ball. (A ball shall be awarded each time a pitcher violates this rule and subsequently engages the pitching plate.) **IF THE PITCHER GOES TO HIS MOUTH WHILE ON THE RUBBER IT IS A BALK WITH RUNNERS ON, WHETHER HE WIPES OFF OR NOT.**

## **D. DELAY OF GAME. Warning, ejection, replaced, or ball to batter.**

10. throwing to any player other than the catcher when the batter is in the batter's box, unless it is an attempt to retire a runner. (rarely, if ever will see happen) EJECTION after a WARNING

11. consuming time as the result of the coach or his representative conferring with a defensive player or players after being charged with three conferences REPLACED

12. failing to pitch or make or attempt a play, including a legal feint, within 20 seconds after he has received the ball (rarely, if ever will see happen) BALL to the batter.

## **E. INTENTIONALLY PITCH CLOSE TO A BATTER.**

13. EJECT. If umpire has any doubt, a warning may be given.

## **F. BALK. If there is a runner or runners, any of the following acts by a pitcher while touching the pitcher's plate is a BALK:**

14. 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 Rule 6-1-4 **SEE #5, pg. 5**

15. 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

16. making an illegal pitch from any position Rule 6-1, 6-2-1a-d

17. 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

18. taking a hand off the ball while in a set position, 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 #15

19. 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. (difficult to see in a 2-man system, be absolutely 'sure' before calling)

## **G. BALK. If there is a runner or runners and the pitcher is NOT touching the pitcher's plate:**

20. 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. (rarely happens)

# NFHS Balk Differences

1. A balk is an IMMEDIATE dead ball.
2. Rule 1-1-4 At the time of the pitch\*, all fielders shall be on fair ground except the catcher who shall be in the catcher's box. A FIELDER IS IN FAIR GROUND WHEN AT LEAST ONE FOOT IS TOUCHING FAIR GROUND. Penalty: Illegal pitch
3. 3rd to 1st move...legal
4. From the wind-up position the pitcher can only deliver a pitch or properly step off the pitching plate...he cannot throw or feint toward a base from the wind-up position.

\***Time of pitch** is when the pitcher has committed himself to delivering the pitch to the batter.

**For the windup position**, the “time of the pitch” occurs when the pitcher, (a) first starts any movement of his arm(s) or leg(s) after stepping onto the pitcher’s plate with his hands already together in front of his body; (b) with both hands at his side, first starts any movement with **both** arms or leg(s) prior to the pitch; (c) with either hand in front of the body and the other hand at his side, **after** bringing his hands together, first starts any movement of his arm(s) or leg(s) prior to the pitch.

**For the set position**, the “time of the pitch” occurs the instant the pitcher, after coming to a complete and discernible stop, starts any movement with arm(s) and/or leg(s) that commits him to pitch. **Rule 2-28-3**

## **2017-18 NFHS Umpires Manual:**

**Pg. 16, #23.** A balk or illegal pitch may need to be explained, but never demonstrated by the umpire. Possibly there are times when it is permissible to explain what constituted the balk. In a game where learning is not a priority **BUT** the outcome of the game is, such an explanation is out of place, because it is to the advantage of the defensive team and not the umpire’s duty. If you tell how the balk was committed, it will be avoided. It’s the coach’s job, however, to instruct his pitchers in what is legal and what is not. Your job is to umpire the game.

When challenged after you penalize an illegal pitch or action, simply state, without explanation, that there was an illegality. More explanation of what constituted the illegality is permissible as learning becomes a priority over a winner-loser decision. Balk calls and illegal pitches that are questioned can possibly best be explained to coaches or pitchers after the game, if you care to do so and if they are interested. This is a courtesy you might wish to extend. It will help the offending pitcher to avoid the same mistake and penalty in the future. It’s perhaps better to discuss the balk with the pitcher’s coach, possibly with the pitcher listening in, rather than to take up the matter directly with the pitcher. This lets the coach do the coaching.

# NOTES

1. If the pitcher **hesitates** his motion to join his hands, pitch, throw or step off (disengage) the pitching plate...he has committed a balk. BUT...if he begins his motion to bring his hands together and in a continuous move throws or step off...it is NOT a balk.

2. **Flinching knee.** If the pitcher, after coming set, flinches his pivot foot's knee as a separate movement before he throws, it is a balk. BUT...if the flinching is part of a fluid and continuous movement of the throw, it is NOT a balk.

3. **To 'set'.** The meaning of 'coming set' is the pitcher bringing his hands together and then coming to a complete stop. It has become more common to see a pitcher NOT stop with his entire body; i.e., has his hands are 'coming set' his leg immediately moves before the pitch. This is a balk. NOTE: A stop is NOT required before a motion to throw or disengage.

A pitcher is NOT required to make a complete stop if he uses the stretch position with no runners on base. NOTE: 'stretch' is another word used for 'set'.

4. **Stepping to a base or feinting a throw.** A step to a base must have distance and direction to the base.

- a. Distance - The pitcher's free foot must lift up and step down in a different spot.
- b. Direction - The free foot must move toward the base.

**Jump Step.** This is when a pitcher jumps into the air with both feet at the same time. It is legal as long as the non-pivot foot has distance and direction when it touches the ground again.

5. When the pitcher is on the pitching plate and drops the ball (and ball is alive), it is 'no pitch' if there are no runners on unless it crosses a foul line - then it is a 'ball' to the batter. With runners on it is a 'balk' unless it crosses a foul line. **THIS INCLUDES WHEN THROWING TO FIRST BASE. (If the ball slips but goes within reach of a fielder at first base, it would not be a balk even if it doesn't cross the foul line.)**

6. A throw to first base must be thrown to the base or it is a balk. A fielder must be able to make a tag attempt at the base. If F1 throws to first base but there is no fielder there, it is NOT a balk. NOTE: F1 may throw to a fielder who is NOT within reach of a tag play at 2nd and 3rd as long as a runner is at the base or the pitcher is trying to drive a runner back.

7. **DECOYS** are legal. Defense may try a decoy when the pitcher acts as though he throws the ball for a pick-off and the fielder(s) act as if it went to the outfield. (usually done at 2nd base.) If the runner is drawn off the base and defense is able to make a play to put him out, it is a legal play. THIS SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH THE HIGH SCHOOL RULE OF A 'FAKE TAG'.