

Back From the Edge

With a runner on third base, the pitcher lifts his non-pivot foot and breaks the back plane of the pitching plate. At that point, he realizes R3 has taken too generous a lead, so he steps directly toward third and easily picks off R3 (as shown in the PlayPics). Legal? Nope.

Once the pitcher swings his entire free foot past the plane of the back edge of the rubber, he is committed to pitch (or throw or feint to second if there's a play there) and cannot throw to first or throw or feint to third (NFHS 6-2-4f; NCAA 9-1b-3; pro 6.02a1 Cmt.).

In the play example, the pitcher has committed a balk. In NFHS, the play is immediately dead and R3 is awarded home. In pro and NCAA, balks are delayed dead balls.

In the two-umpire system, this balk is extremely difficult to detect, and it should be left to the base umpire. It's possible to use the sole of the shoe as a guide. If the base umpire can see the sole of the free foot as the pitcher kicks back, the pitcher has probably put his entire foot past the back edge of the rubber.



Under NCAA rules, the above restriction also applies if any part of the stride leg (knee) breaks the plane (9-3L). □

