

BALKS PER NFHS

BASEBALL

NFHS BALKS Jan, 2020

By Referee Editors

NFHS rule 2-3 defines a balk as an illegal act committed by the pitcher with a runner or runners on base. The result of a balk is that all runners get to advance one base. The definition doesn't explain what those illegal acts are. Nor will you see the word "deceived," but many players, coaches and fans will be yelling for a balk because the pitcher "deceived" the runner. That's the pitcher's job. If the runner knew when a pickoff throw was coming, he could react accordingly and ultimately better time his advance to the next base. At the same time, if a batter knows the next pitch is going to be a curve ball, he can tee off and have a greater chance of getting a base hit.

So if deception isn't a balk, then what is?

Here's what the pitching rules (found in NFHS rule 6) outline as illegal acts that can be ruled as a balk with a runner or runners on base (without that runner or runners, you may have an illegal pitch – which is

typically just a ball awarded to the batter – but not a balk):

- Feinting toward the batter or first base. A pitcher who directly steps toward the batter or first must throw there (6-2-4a).

- Failing to step directly toward a base with the non-pivot foot when throwing or feinting toward a base (6-2-4b).

- Dropping the ball (even if accidental) when the ball does not cross a foul line. If it crosses the foul line, it is a ball (6-2-4a).

- Failing to pitch to the batter in a continuous motion immediately after any movement of any part of the body that the pitcher habitually uses in his delivery. Sometimes called the "stop-and-start" balk, it occurs when a pitcher does just that. He has made a motion that clearly indicates he is going to pitch or make a pickoff throw, but stops (6-2-4d).

- Taking a hand off the ball while in the set position. Once the pitcher has come to his set position with his hand on the ball in the glove, he may not remove his hand without first stepping off the pitching plate (6-2-4e).

- Throwing or feinting to an unoccupied base. The exceptions to that rule are that a pitcher may throw to an unoccupied base for the purpose of completing an appeal play or if a play is imminent, such as a runner who takes off early and is headed toward that base (6-2-2a).

- Failing to pitch to the batter when the entire non-pivot foot passes behind the back edge of the pitcher's plate (except when legally feinting or throwing to second base) (6-2-4f).

- Making an illegal pitch. A pitcher may not apply a foreign substance to the ball, spit on the ball or glove, rub the ball on his

glove, clothing or person if it defaces the ball or discolor the ball with dirt. If he does and he delivers a pitch, that pitch is illegal. NFHS rules also prohibit a pitcher from having tape or bandages on his pitching fingers or palm (6-2-1a, b, c, d).

- Failing to stop while in the set position (6-1-2).

- A pitcher goes to his mouth while engaged with the pitcher's plate (6-2-1).

- Taking the sign off the pitching plate. The pitcher is required to take the sign while on the pitching plate (6-1-1).

- Adopting a pitching stance that neither qualifies as the windup nor the set position — i.e., the so-called hybrid stance (6-1-3).

- The so-called gorilla stance, where a pitcher has his arm swinging in front of him as he leans in to take the sign. Any swinging motion of the arm constitutes the beginning of the pitching motion (6-1-3).

- The pitcher positions himself within approximately five feet of the pitching plate without possession of the ball. Typically seen while attempting the hidden-ball trick (6-2-5).

Unlike other rules codes, a balk in NFHS play is an immediate dead ball. The NFHS Umpires Manual says the umpire will point and announce, "That's a balk," followed by the dead-ball signal.

The manual does not assign balk responsibilities, but the CCA manual provides practical guidelines for who should be primarily responsible for each type of balk because some are more obvious from particular positions.

The plate umpire should concentrate on:

1. Left-handed pitchers stepping to the plate.
2. Left-handed pitchers

coming to a complete stop.

3. Right-handed pitchers coming to a complete stop.

4. Right-handed pitchers stepping to the plate on the third-to-first move.

5. Right-handed pitchers gaining ground on the jump turn.

6. Right-handed pitchers closing their front shoulder before the jump turn.

The base umpire should concentrate on:

1. Left-handed pitchers coming to a complete stop.

2. Right-handed pitchers breaking their front knees before the jump turn.

3. Right-handed pitchers gaining ground on the jump turn.

Adapted from High School Baseball Game Changers: Plays You Gotta Get Right. Available at Referee.com.