



NCAA BASEBALL PLAYING RULES INTERPRETATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS 2023 – 2024

April 5, 2024

Guidelines for the Pitcher Starting Pitching Motions – Appendix F

The original interpretation for “Guidelines for the Pitcher Starting Pitching Motions” is from March 13, 2024. The information below is an additional clarification on the topic.

***“Interpretations:** The pitcher may not begin their preliminary motions to either deliver a pitch from the windup or to come to a set position before the batter is in the box, alert to the pitcher and ready to hit.*

Rationale:

The pace of play during baseball games flows smoothly when umpires, pitchers, catchers, and batters work together to allow everyone the opportunity to be ready to do their particular job. An increasing number of instances have been reported that some pitchers are coming to a set position and then starting to deliver the pitch before the batter is ready to hit. This is not only a competitive issue, but a safety issue as well. #10 in Appendix F about the 20-Second Action Clock Limit states "Pitchers are expected to begin the motion to deliver the pitch as soon as the batter enters the box and becomes alert to the pitcher." Being “alert to the pitcher” includes being ready to attempt to hit any pitch about to be delivered. The batter must be in this position with 10 or more seconds remaining in the time limit. Assuming that the pitcher has already received a signal for the next pitch, this gives the pitcher at least 10 seconds or more to check any runners, come set, and deliver the pitcher. The definition of "Quick Pitch" in Rule 2-68 states that a quick pitch is "an illegal pitch made with the obvious intent to catch the batter off balance". So, if the pitcher starts the motion to deliver the pitch before the batter is set, alert to the pitcher and ready to hit and delivers the pitch, it is a quick pitch, which is an illegal pitch (a ball) when there are no runners on and a balk when there are any runners on base. The plate umpire must work with the catcher, pitcher, and batter to make sure a proper pace of play is maintained for everyone involved.”

Additional Clarification:

There were several questions received during the past few days about how to administer the situations addressed in the memo dealing with a pitcher starting preliminary motions before the batter is alert to the pitcher and ready to hit. Here is some additional clarification.

There are two issues that were addressed in the memo. One situation that has been happening more this season is the pitcher **starting the preliminary motions to come to a set position** prior to the batter being alert and ready to hit. This situation needs some further explanation about what the penalty should be and how the umpires should control the situation. In several cases, the umpire has simply called "time", warned the pitcher (and catcher) to be sure to let the hitter get set and ready to hit, and the game proceeded with no

further issues. The one warning and explanation is good game management especially if the batter's actions may have caused the pitcher to start their motion too soon. The warning is not required by rule and shouldn't be done more than one time per team per game. What should the penalty be if this happens again? The umpire should not continue to call time out and it is not a "quick pitch" as the pitch was not delivered. The only logical conclusion would be to call time for the pitcher's actions so that the batter is not put at a disadvantage, and then administer this action that stops the clock under the 20-second time limit rule. With runners on base, this would be a "reset" if it hadn't already been used for this batter and a "ball" if the reset had been used. With no runners on base, this would be a "ball" as there are no resets with no base runners. (There are pitchers who pitch from the set position when there are no base runners.)

The other issue is a pitcher ***starting the motion to deliver the pitch, either from a windup or after coming to a set position***. This is the situation where the pitcher has actually started a motion to deliver the pitch and that was addressed by this sentence in the recent memo: "So, if the pitcher ***starts the motion to deliver the pitch*** before the batter is set, alert to the pitcher, ready to hit *and delivers the pitch*, it is a quick pitch, which is an illegal pitch (a ball) when there are no runners on and a balk when there are any runners on base." Once the pitcher starts the motion to deliver the pitch, the pitcher is committed to do so without alteration or interruption. If the pitcher were to stop this motion without delivering the pitch, it wouldn't be a "quick pitch" by definition, but it would still be an illegal pitch or a balk per the regular pitching rules. If the pitcher continues to deliver the pitch, it is a "quick pitch" and the penalty is the same.

There was another question about a situation similar to that described in Appendix F, #6 (p. 118):

"6. When there are no runners on base, and before starting a windup motion or beginning the motion to deliver the pitch, if a pitcher steps off the pitcher's plate the time limit (or clock) does not stop unless the umpire grants the pitcher "time" for a legitimate reason."

According to the question, the pitcher intentionally stepped off with a few seconds left in the time limit and after the batter was alert and ready to hit within the 10-second limit. The batter was confused and stepped back from their stance. The umpire assessed a "strike" to the batter for not remaining ready to hit. If the pitcher did this intentionally to get a violation called on the batter, it seems unfair. The pitcher can step off and the clock continues to run and the batter should continue to be ready to hit. A better way to administer this situation would be to call "time" (once) and remind the batter to remain in the batter's box and ready to hit as the clock will continue to run. If this happens again and the batter steps back, call "time" for an offensive charged conference. If the offense is out of charged conferences, then award a "strike" on the batter. Don't allow an intentional act to abuse the rule to put the opponent at a disadvantage.

March 19, 2024

Reminder – Use of Technology in Dugout.

A number of reports have been received recently regarding the continued use of various types of technology in the dugout during games. As a reminder, by Rule 5-2-f, there are only two types of technology permitted in the dugout or nearby areas for use during games – one device (such as a telephone, cellphone, walkie-talkie, etc.) that can only be used to communicate with the bullpen, and an exclusively designed, one-way electronic communication device used to relay the pitch or play call from the dugout to the field. The use of any other devices (such as video monitors, laptops, tablets, iPads, cell phones, binoculars, smart watches, etc.) that are able to collect, send or receive data, messages or video are not permitted during the game.

Umpires are asked to remind the head coaches at the pregame meeting about the use of such equipment and should receive confirmation that all playing equipment meets NCAA rules and regulations (Rule 4-4-c). If any such equipment is noticed or suspected during the game, the violator (in this case, the head coach as they are responsible for the behavior in the dugout) should be warned. If the use of any such equipment does not stop and is noticed by an umpire, the violator (head coach) is ejected and by Rule 5-2-f-Penalty receives a post-participation ejection from the next game.

It is difficult for the umpire crew who is focusing on umpiring the game on the field to notice whether technology is being used illegally in the dugout. This issue is a matter of coaching ethics and should be controlled by the head coach. Technology can provide some great information that can be used for the coaching, training, and development of players. However, that data should be accessed after the game to allow for a fair and competitive game environment. Umpires who receive suspicions or reports of such use of technology but do not observe this themselves should report that information to the umpire coordinator or assigner for that contest and the matter should be dealt with at the institutional or conference level.

March 13, 2024

Guidelines for the Pitcher Starting Pitching Motions – Appendix F.

Interpretations: The pitcher may not begin their preliminary motions to either deliver a pitch from the windup or to come to a set position before the batter is in the box, alert to the pitcher and ready to hit.

Rationale:

The pace of play during baseball games flows smoothly when umpires, pitchers, catchers, and batters work together to allow everyone the opportunity to be ready to do their particular job. An increasing number of instances have been reported that some pitchers are coming to a set position and then starting to deliver the pitch before the batter is ready to hit. This is not only a competitive issue, but a safety issue as well. #10 in Appendix F about the 20-Second Action Clock Limit states "Pitchers are expected to begin the motion to deliver the pitch as soon as the batter enters the box and becomes alert to the pitcher." Being "alert to the pitcher" includes being ready to attempt to hit any pitch about to be delivered. The batter must be in this position with 10 or more seconds remaining in the time limit. Assuming that the pitcher has already received a signal for the next pitch, this gives the pitcher at least 10 seconds or more to check any runners, come set, and deliver the pitch. The definition of "Quick Pitch" in Rule 2-68 states that a quick pitch is "an illegal pitch made with the obvious intent to catch the batter off balance". So, if the pitcher starts the motion to deliver the pitch before the batter is set, alert to the pitcher and ready to hit, it is a quick pitch, which is an illegal pitch (a ball) when there are no runners on and a balk when there are any runners on base. The plate umpire must work with the catcher, pitcher, and batter to make sure a proper pace of play is maintained for everyone involved.

March 7, 2024

Guidelines for Catcher Action – Appendix F, Item 5-d.

Interpretations: If game situations arise during an at-bat with runners on base that warrant defensive adjustment or signaling (i.e., change in runner position, full count, potential bunt play, etc.), the catcher may step out in front of home plate and quickly give defensive signals without causing a charged reset for this at-bat. This must be done in a timely manner within the first few seconds after the ball has been returned to the pitcher. At this time the action clock will stop and then restart at 20 seconds when the catcher is back in the catcher's box. If the batter has already entered the batter's box and is alert to the pitcher (10 seconds remaining on the clock), the catcher's actions would not be deemed timely, and a charged reset would be recorded for that at-bat. If the reset has been used during this at-bat, a charged defensive conference would be required to stop the action clock and allow further signals or communication.

Rationale:

This additional interpretation of when to charge a reset for the catcher's actions in giving defensive signals has been added as this is not a tactic to delay the game but a part of the game to allow for defensive equity.

February 16, 2024

Guidelines for Use of the Double First Base – Rule 1.7.b.

Interpretations: When using the double first base the following guidelines shall be followed to properly administer the playing rules.

1. A batted ball hitting or bounding over the white portion of the bag is a fair ball. A batted ball hitting or bounding over the colored (orange or green) bag without first touching or bounding over the white section is foul.
2. When an initial play is being made on the batter-runner at first base, the defense must use the white section of the double base and the batter-runner must use the colored base except in the case of a dropped third strike. After a dropped third strike, if the fielder is drawn to the side of the colored base, the runner would go the white base and the fielder to the colored base. On a dropped third strike, the fielder and batter-runner may touch either the white or colored base.
3. If there is a play on the batter-runner and the batter-runner touches only the white portion of the double base and the defense appeals prior to the batter-runner returning to first base, it is treated the same as missing the base. Penalty: Batter-runner is out.
4. On extra-base hits or other balls hit to the outfield when there is no chance for a play to be made at the double base, the batter-runner may touch either the white or colored section of the base. Should, however, the batter-runner reach and go beyond first base, they may only return to the white section of the base.
5. Once the batter-runner reaches first base, they shall then use only the white base.

Rationale:

The playing rule currently permit the use of the double first base during the regular season but are silent with regard to appropriate guidelines to administer plays at first base. The guidelines above will provide guidance to umpires, player and coaches regarding the proper application and mechanics when games are played with a double first base.

February 12, 2024

Definition of Infield Fly – Rule 2.48.

Interpretations: If interference is called during an Infield Fly, the ball remains alive until it is determined whether the ball is fair or foul. If fair, both the runner who interfered with the fielder and the batter are out. If foul, even if caught, the runner is out and the batter returns to bat.

Rationale:

The playing rule does not specifically address the scenario of when a runner interferes with a fielder attempting to field an infield fly.

February 1, 2024

Required Visible Action Clock – Appendix F.

Interpretations: The visible clock requirement, approved in 2022, is to be adhered to for all NCAA baseball competition. The visible clock requirement is effective for the 2024 season for Division I and for the 2025 season for Division II and Division III. Institutions that regularly schedule games at non-institutionally owned facilities shall plan to facilitate the use of a visible action/between innings clock.

If extenuating circumstances occur, i.e. clock malfunction, power outage, a last-minute change of venue due to unplayable field conditions, etc., and a visible clock is not available, umpires shall be prepared to administer the 20-second action clock and between innings timing rules on the field. This shall include appropriate mechanics to notify both teams of the start and reset of the clock, as well as countdown marks within the 120 seconds between innings time.

Rationale:

The playing rule requires that all times of the game (20 second action during play and 120 seconds between innings) be displayed on the visible timing device. In the event that the timing device malfunctions or is not available, the umpires on the field shall be prepared to manage the timing rules effectively.

October 2, 2023

Electronic Communication Devices – Rule 5-2-f Note 1.

Interpretations: The use of exclusively one-way electronic communication devices that transmit pre-recorded message(s) or signals for the purpose of relaying the pitch or play call from the dugout to the field (to the pitcher or other defensive or offensive players) is permitted. The use of an in-ear communication device with direct or live audio remains restricted to the defensive position of catcher.

Rationale:

The rules committee is clarifying that digital one-way electronic communication devices, such as a wrist device or a device that transmits a pre-recorded audio message meet the intent of the current playing rule. These types of devices may transmit stored, pre-recorded messages or number codes. The restriction of the use of direct or live one-way audio communication devices to the defensive position of catcher remains in place.