



NCAA Baseball – Notes from the Secretary-Rules Editor April 29, 2019

It's time for the last few weeks of regular season play and the start of the conference and regional tournaments. Let's review a couple of recent rule questions as we begin this very competitive part of the 2019 season.

Rule 9-1-a and b – Pitching Positions

At the start of the season, the descriptions of both the windup and the set positions were altered slightly to include the starting positions of the pitcher's feet. In the windup, the free foot now must be "touching or behind (breaking) the plane of the front edge of the pitcher's plate." In the set position, the pivot foot must be "parallel to the pitcher's plate and his free foot must be entirely in front of the pitcher's plate." These small changes have made it easier to distinguish what position the pitcher is using and have caused very few questions. More questions continue to be raised about parts of the rules that were not changed, such as when some pitchers alter their deliveries to throw off the batter's timing.

For example, from a windup position, the pitcher "may take one step backward or sideward and one step forward with the free foot". That first step is used to allow the pitcher to turn and adjust his pivot foot in front of the rubber before completing the delivery. The first "adjustment" step is not required as the pitcher could simply step forward with his free foot and deliver the pitch. This is legal if it is not a "quick pitch" as defined in Rule 2-68 when the batter is not ready to hit. A similar move could be used from a set position with no runners on base. Rule 9-1-b-Note 2 allows the pitcher to avoid a "complete and discernible stop" with the bases unoccupied, but he must follow all other parts of the rule such as bringing his hands together in front of his body.

In the descriptions of both positions, the rules state that from a windup or set position, "any natural movement associated with the pitch commits the pitcher to pitch *without alteration or interruption*." The one exception is listed in Rule 9-1-a-Note 2 on page 84 that says, "A pitcher may pause during his delivery from the windup position without penalty." So, a pitcher using a windup can pause, in other words "freeze" his motion briefly, during the delivery. He could pause briefly after taking the initial adjustment step mentioned above or he could pause with his free foot in the air before completing the delivery. He is still committed to pitch and cannot change his motion and throw to a base if there are runners. A pause does *not* include a pitcher pumping his leg down and back up as that would be an alteration or interruption of the normal pitching motion. A pause is also not allowed when the pitcher is using the set position as the Note referenced above only refers to a pause during a windup delivery.

A pitcher can change the style or speed of his movements during different pitches, but must still comply with all the statements in either 9-1-a or 9-1-b. Please review those again so the language is clear in your mind.

Rules 2-55, 8-3-e, and 8-7 – Obstruction and the Collision Rule

N a t i o n a l C o l l e g i a t e A t h l e t i c A s s o c i a t i o n

Supporting student-athlete success on the field, in the classroom and for life

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

Plays that involve tags at any base, especially scoring plays at the plate, are critical to the outcome of the game and can involve several factors that make them difficult to judge. Possible obstruction is one of those factors that we have addressed this season. The rules state that the catcher (or other fielder) cannot block the pathway of the runner unless he is in possession of the ball. But just because the defensive player is in the baseline without the ball doesn't mean that it is always obstruction. The defensive player must also "hinder or impede the progress of the runner."

Let's use a play at the plate as an example. Runner from second base attempting to score on a base hit to the outfield. The catcher takes a position in the baseline shortly after the runner rounds third base on his way to the plate. The catcher is now in jeopardy of obstructing the runner if he does not receive the ball before the runner gets to his position. If the catcher clearly has possession of the ball before the runner gets there, it is not obstruction. If, however, the runner attempting to reach the base makes contact with the catcher before he has the ball OR, in the judgment of the umpire, could not reach the base because he was hindered by the catcher without the ball, it is obstruction and the runner should be called safe. This can happen if the runner tries to slide around the catcher who is in the baseline, reaches or passes the position of the catcher before he has the ball, but misses touching the plate because he was unable to reach it due to the catcher's position in the baseline. Many catchers and other fielders have been well-coached to take an initial position out of the baseline (usually in front of the plate or base) before receiving the throw.

Pace of Play Issues – Charged Conferences and Timing Between Innings

I have observed a number of games recently where there was excellent communication between umpire crew members and coaches about charged conferences and the timing between innings. Keep up the great work!

Wishing everyone involved in college baseball continued success as the season winds down toward tournament time!

Randy Bruns

NCAA Baseball Secretary-Rules Editor