Softball Pitching Rules

Pitching is perhaps the most crucial position in softball. The pitching motion and mechanics are so different from baseball that it is no wonder that every year there is confusion as to what constitutes a legal or illegal pitch. It becomes even more complex when you consider that Little League has a couple of rules that are different from high school and other youth softball associations.

It is important for us as a league to train our managers, coaches, umpires, and players to understand the proper steps for throwing a legal pitch because as the players get older, and the games get more meaningful (i.e. All-Stars) the umpires become more experienced as well. No one wants to see a player on their team melt down because the pitching habits they've worked on and developed are actually illegal. This article covers the rules on pitching mechanics, the penalty, advisement, and some commonly seen examples of illegal pitches.

**The Rule**

***8.01:***

*(a) A legal pitching delivery shall be a ball that is delivered to the batter in an underhand motion.*

*(b) Both feet must be on the ground within or partially within the 24-inch length of the pitcher's plate.*

*(c) The shoulders shall be in line with first and third bases. When taking the pitching position, the pitcher must have his/her hands separated and must have the ball in either the glove or the pitching hand.*

*(d) Prior to pitching, the pitcher shall take a position with his/her pivot foot* [same foot as pitching hand] *in contact with the pitcher's plate. This contact must be on or partially on the top surface of the pitcher's plate. The non-pivot foot must be on or behind the pitcher's plate.*

*(e) While on the pitching plate, the pitcher shall take the signal or appear to be taking a signal with the hands separated. The ball must remain in either the glove or pitching hand.*

*(f) After completing (e) above, the pitcher shall bring the hands together in front of the body for not less than one second and not more than 10 seconds before starting the delivery.*

*(g) A backward step may be taken before or simultaneous with the hands being brought together. The pivot foot must remain in contact with the pitching plate at all times prior to the forward step.*

*A.R. 1-If the hands are together while in the pitching position, the pitcher may not step back.*

*A.R. 2- For the pitcher to remove himself/herself from the pitching position after the hands have been brought together but prior to the start of the pitch as noted in 8.01(k), the pitcher must legally step back from the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot first.*

*(h) In the act of delivering the ball, the pitcher may take one step with the non-pivot foot simultaneously with the release of the ball. The step must be forward and toward the batter within or partially within the 24-inch length of the pitcher's plate.****NOTE****: It is not a step if the pitcher slides the pivot foot across the pitcher's plate toward the batter, or if the pivot foot turns or slides in order to push off the pitcher's plate, provided contact is maintained with the plate. Raising the foot off the pitching plate and returning it to the plate creates a rocking motion and is an illegal act.*

*(i) The pitcher shall not be considered in the pitching position unless the catcher is in position to receive the pitch.*

*A.R.-The catcher is considered to be in position to receive a pitch when his/her mask is on and is facing the pitcher. It is not necessary to be in a squatting position.*

*(j) The pitcher may not take the pitching position on the pitcher's plate without having the ball in his/her possession.*

*(k) The pitch starts when one hand is taken off the ball after the hands have been placed together.*

*(l) The pitcher must not make any motion to pitch without immediately delivering the ball to the batter.*

*(m) The pitcher must not use a pitching motion in which, after bringing the hands together, the pitcher removes one hand from the ball, and returns the ball to both hands in front of the body.*

*(n) The pitcher must not make a stop or reversal of the forward motion after separating the hands.*

*(o) The pitcher must not make two revolutions of the arm in the windmill motion. A pitcher may drop the arm to the side and to the rear before starting the windmill motion. If the windmill motion is not used the ball must be delivered toward home plate on the first forward swing of the pitching arm past the hip.*

*(p) The delivery must be an underhanded motion with the hand below the hip and the wrist not farther from the body than the elbow.*

*(q) The release of the ball and follow through of the hand and wrist must be forward and past the straight, vertical line of the body.*

*(r) Pushing off with the pivot foot from a place other than the pitcher's plate is illegal. This includes a "crow hop" as defined under Rule 2.00.*

*(s) The pivot foot must remain in contact with or push off and drag away from the pitching plate prior to the front foot touching the ground, as long as the pivot foot remains in contact with the ground. When the pivot foot leaves the ground it is considered a "leap" and is considered an illegal pitch. See definition under Rule 2.00.*

*(t) The pitcher must not make another revolution after releasing the ball.*

*(u) The pitcher shall not deliberately drop, roll, or bounce the ball in order to prevent the batter from hitting it.*

*(v) The pitcher has 20 seconds to release the next pitch after receiving the ball or after the umpire indicates "play ball."*

***PENALTY:****The penalty imposed for violation of all subsections of rule 8.01, with the exception of subsection (i), is an illegal pitch. Violation of (i) is ruled as a No Pitch.*

***Minor/Major Divisions:****The pitch shall be called a ball.*

***Junior/Senior/Big League:****The pitch shall be called a ball and all base runners advance one base without liability to be put out.*

*If a play follows the illegal pitch, the manager of the offense may advise the plate umpire of a decision to decline the illegal pitch penalty and accept the play. Such election shall be made immediately at the end of the play. However, if the batter hits the ball and reaches first base safely, and if all base runners advance at least one base on the action resulting from the batted ball, the play proceeds without reference to the illegal pitch.*

***NOTE: Minor/Major Divisions:****A batter hit by a pitch shall be awarded first base without reference to the illegal pitch.****Junior/Senior/Big League:****A batter hit by a pitch shall be awarded first base and all base runners advance one base without reference to the illegal pitch.*

As per 8.01(d) above, in Little League the pitcher may start with their non-pivot foot behind and off of the pitcher's plate, OR may start with the non-pivot foot on the plate and step back with that foot either before or during the hands being brought together to set for the pitch (8.01(g)). However, ASA/USA, NSA, PGF, USSSA, NCAA, Olympics, and NPF (National Pro Fastpitch) all require both feet touching the pitcher's plate to start and the only step allowed during the act of pitching is the non-pivot foot moving forward and toward the plate. For this reason, and because there is no discernable or proven benefit for the pitcher to start with or move the non-pivot foot behind the pitcher's plate, we recommend to manager, coaches, and parents to teach players to start with both feet touching the pitcher's plate and take only one step forward. That way the player will not have to re-learn their pitching motion at a later point in their softball participation.