



Handling the Hybrid Stance in School Ball

By Tim Stevens

Kudos to Phil Bogardus for coming out of the gate with a great situation and great question to start off the season. Phil caught an illegal hybrid stance in his first game and not only handled it well but checked in for a little feedback. His question led me to do some follow-up on this point of emphasis that I have talked about but haven't really handled in-depth enough.

First off, let's define the hybrid stance, because that in itself can be a little confusing. Remember that there are two pitching positions defined in the FED book: wind-up and set. Each position is defined by the placement of the feet when addressing the pitching plate, and more specifically the placement of the pivot foot. [I know that this seems trivial, but I did have a young umpire ask one time "which is the pivot foot?" In fairness, that is a reasonable question so in case that needs to be defined it can best be described simply as the foot on the same side of the body as the hand with which the pitcher is throwing – See Figure 1 for what pivot foot is]. If the pitcher places the pivot foot parallel to and on or in front of the pitching plate the pitcher is in the set position (See Figure 1 foot placement for set position).

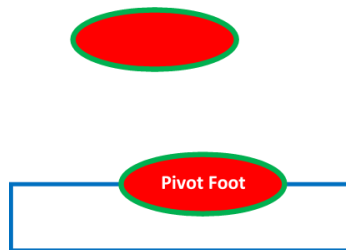


Figure 1- Set Position Foot Placement.
For Right Hand Pitcher the Right Foot is Pivot Foot.

For all other placements of the pivot foot the pitcher is in the windup (See Figure 2 foot placement for windup position).

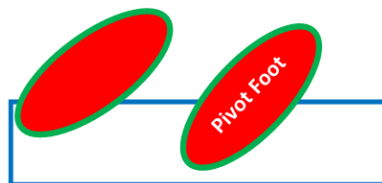


Figure 2 – Legal Windup Position Foot Placement.

The rest of the rules regarding pitching positions follow whether the pitcher is in the set or wind-up.

For a pitcher in the set position, the non-pivot foot must be in front of the line through the front edge of the pitching plate (See Figure 1 for legal position). In reality, to do otherwise would be awkward (and funny) as heck and I personally would rather watch the result of his trying to pitch from an unauthorized stance than penalize it (See Figure 3 for illegal set position).

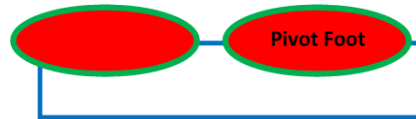


Figure 3 – Illegal Set Position Foot Placement.

Seriously, though, you are probably never going to see a pitcher from the set position with his non-pivot foot behind the pivot foot as shown in Figure 3, so that is not worth mentioning. It is the positioning from the wind-up that we need to focus upon.

When pitching in the wind-up position the pitcher must have his non-pivot foot on or behind a line running through the front edge of the pitcher's plate (See Figures 4, 5 & 6).

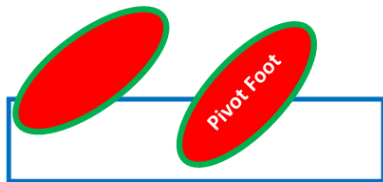


Figure 4 – Legal Windup Position Foot Placement.

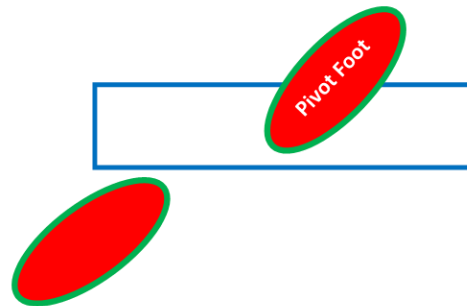


Figure 5 – Legal Windup Position Foot Placement.

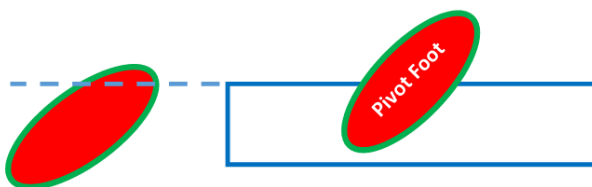


Figure 6 – Legal Windup Position Foot Placement.

This is where we have problems. The hybrid stance is defined as a pitcher who has his pivot foot in a defined wind-up position (e.g., not parallel to the front edge of the pitcher's plate) but has his non-pivot foot clearly in front of the front edge of the pitching plate (See Figure 7).

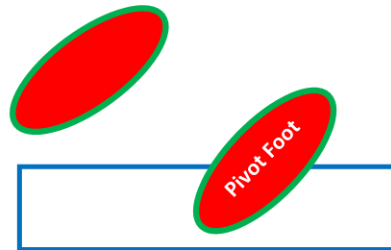


Figure 7 – The Hybrid Stance. This foot positioning is illegal.

In most instances the pitcher is turned at a 45-degree angle on the pitching plate with both feet pointing in the same direction.

It's important to note that I've confused many people with this description into thinking that the pivot foot must either be parallel or perpendicular to the pitching plate. This is not true. What is true is that if the pivot foot is not in the set position then it is in the windup position, so the placement of the non-pivot foot must be legal (e.g., on or behind the front edge of the pitching plate). Remember that if ANY part of the foot is touching ANY part of this line the position is legal. That is to say that if the back edge of the non-pivot heel is touching this line in the windup then he is okay.

Remember per 6-1-3 when pitcher is in set position, he "shall stand with his entire non-pivot foot in front of a line extending through the front edge of the pitcher's plate and with his entire pivot foot in contact with or directly in front of and parallel to the pitcher's plate." He does not have this restriction when in the windup position per 6-1-2. For additional clarity Figures 8 to 11 show both legal and illegal foot positioning for both the set and windup positions.

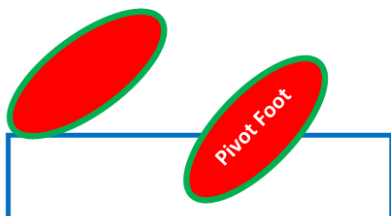


Figure 8 – Legal Windup Position Since Non-Pivot Foot is Touching Line Extending Thru Front of Plate.

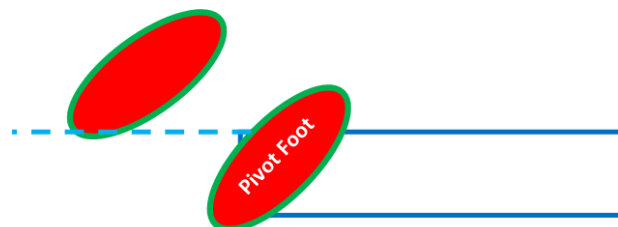


Figure 9 – Legal Windup Position Since Non-Pivot Foot is Touching Line Extending Thru Front of Plate.

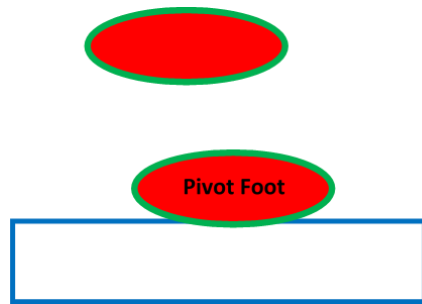
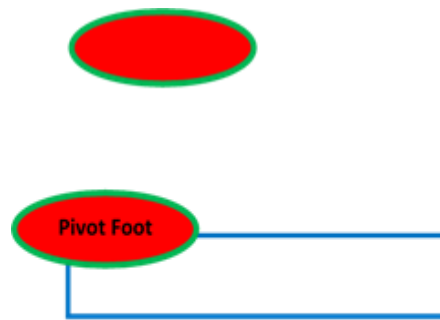


Figure 10 – Legal Set Position as Non-Pivot Foot is in Front of Plate and Entire Pivot Foot is Parallel and in Contact With Plate



LEGAL
Figure 11 – ~~Illegal Set Position as Entire~~ Pivot Foot is not in Contact With Plate

Now that we have defined the hybrid stance, what is the best enforcement? Phil’s question was whether or not it should be immediate dead ball or whether the pitch should be allowed to continue and subsequently enforced. That brings us to the second part of this article – enforcement.

It’s important to remember that the hybrid stance becomes illegal as soon as the pitcher engages in it. Once the pitcher’s pivot foot is in windup and the non-pivot foot is in front there is no way he can legally pitch from that position (Again, See Figure 7 for the illegal hybrid stance). That being said, for all intents and purposes if an umpire recognizes this illegal stance it should be handled even before any further action is taken by the pitcher. By rule it is pretty much impossible to move from this stance to a legal stance without making a movement that constitutes start of the pitch (except completely stepping off the rubber with the pivot foot), so recovery is moot. This means that the illegal position needs to be handled the instant the pitcher engages in it and does not recognize it as illegal.

So how best to handle this? As with any early season pitching anomaly, I strongly advise taking the first 1-2 instances as an opportunity to make corrections by calling time and instructing the pitcher and his coach that he is attempting to pitch from an illegal position. As always, don’t try to coach the player but simply explain what the violation is. Keep it short and factual, like “from that position the left foot has can’t be in front of the rubber” or something to that effect. Once you feel you have given enough license for the pitcher make correction then enforce as soon as the pitcher gets into the position and isn’t taking any measures to fix it by stepping back off the rubber. This is an illegal pitch and results in a ball with no runner on base and a balk with runner on base.

If we handle wisely and consistently as a group we will be able to nip this irritant in the bud early and not have to deal with it later on in the season. Thanks for reading and have a great season!