



May 6, 2024

NFHS Softball Weekly Rule Interpretations

There have been many discussions about the rule change allowing the pitcher to have both feet disengaged from the playing surface while pushing off from the pitching plate. NFHS has created a video that provides a detailed breakdown of a pitch and highlights areas of focus that umpires should use to apply the NFHS rules to the pitchers actions. This video is available here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU-vs6Qe0Cg> This week's interpretation will elaborate on some of the items covered in the video as well as mentioning some additional points that need to be considered when discussing pitching and specifically when discussing the replant and a pitcher possibly gaining distance.

When we are discussing distance from the pitching plate we need to clearly separate the possible distance gained by the pitcher having both feet disengaged from the playing surface vs gaining additional distance from a replant. Is it possible that a pitcher will gain distance when they push off from the pitching plate and both feet become airborne (now legal) vs pushing off from the pitching plate and dragging the pivot foot (required last year)? Yes, it is likely that some pitchers will gain a few inches of travel when they are not "pulling an anchor" so to speak by dragging the pivot foot. Now that both feet are allowed to be airborne this distance gained is a result of the legal action of having both feet disengaged from the playing surface, not from a replant. Again this action of having both feet disengaged and any resulting distance gained by the pitcher from following this rule change is legal and should not be considered when evaluating a pitcher.

The next important consideration is the difference between landing and replanting. What goes up must come down so when a pitcher becomes airborne with both feet those feet will at some point land back on the ground. Almost all pitchers will land prior to delivering their pitch. When the pivot foot lands first there is the potential of that foot pushing again from this new spot and moving the pitcher's non-pivot foot closer to home plate. This push from somewhere other than the pitching plate resulting in the non-pivot foot becoming closer to home plate is the action that NFHS defines as illegal. What needs to be clearly understood is in order to be illegal the non-pivot foot travel has to be altered as a result of the pivot foot pushing again. Most pitchers will have their non-pivot foot travel farther once the pivot foot is on the ground as the non-pivot foot has not landed yet, but that travel is a result of the original push from the pitching plate, not from an additional push from somewhere other than the pitching plate and is legal. So again, that non-pivot foot went up and it has to come down and as long as its travel is not changed (gains additional distance due to pivot foot pushing again) then that action is legal. In the video breakdown this pitcher does get airborne with both feet and does land on the pivot foot first but does not replant as defined by NFHS as there is no added movement of the non-pivot foot as a result of the pivot foot coming in contact with the ground. To summarize this pitcher is landing not replanting.

A few additional items to consider. It appears that some umpires have increased their scrutiny of the pitchers' feet now that it is permissible to have both feet disengaged from the playing surface at the same time. Actions such as closing the hip or pushing with the pivot foot as they deliver the pitch and

squaring up to the batter or tucking that pivot foot behind them has always been legal and should remain legal. When this action is performed the non-pivot foot is on the ground and does not move any closer to home plate so there is no violation of the NFHS pitching rule. Another item to remember is the timing of this action as it occurs during the act of delivering the pitch and should not be considered illegal as the ball is out of the pitcher's hand typically before this action is completed and the non-pivot foot does not move closer to home plate prior to the act of delivering the pitch. In addition, it should be remembered that after the pitch is released the actions of the pitcher's feet can no longer create an illegal pitch. When evaluating these pitches we should not change the way we evaluate the end of a pitcher's delivery just because they changed the way that they got from the pitching plate to their point of release. It is legal to have both feet disengaged from the playing surface so if they utilize that part of the pitching rule it does not change the rest of the pitching rule, or restrict them from doing something that a pitcher that drags away from the pitching plate has always been allowed to do.

Another way to look at these types of videos when evaluating legal or illegal is to first watch the video and only focus on the non-pivot foot. Watch only the non-pivot foot as it travels from the pitching plate to its landing spot and see if it gains an additional push (or flat spot in the travel) during the pitch. If you watch this pitcher again and just watch the non-pivot foot it goes up and lands but does not gain any additional distance due to the pivot foot landing first. Again, we would say this pitcher is landing, not replanting as they are not adding distance to the travel of the non-pivot foot resulting in it becoming closer to home plate. Another way to watch this video is fast forward to the end of the pitch around 3 minutes 5 1/2 seconds in the video and just watch the last few seconds from where the pivot foot reengages the ground until the ball is released. Then ask yourself if I saw a pitcher who had a normal drag from the pitching plate to this point and then finished their pitch the same way as this pitcher is finishing their pitch would I think they were illegal? Or have I changed my evaluation criteria due to the pitcher having been airborne. Again, the way they get there (pivot foot dragging or airborne) should not influence the way we evaluate the legality of their actions as they finish their delivery.