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RHP's Shutting Down the Runner at First Base

Photo Courtesy of Southern Illinois University Athletics

How many catchers "actually" throw 1.90 to second base? The true answer is NOT MANY!

With that in mind, I am going to attempt to give you some hints on right-handed pitchers shutting down runners at first base.

In actuality, very few catchers have the physical ability to throw 2.00 to second base, let alone 1.90. Granted, there are some MLB catchers and some high end college guys out there who have the capability to throw in the 1.90s. However, almost everything has to come together just perfectly for a catcher to execute such a throw. In fact, at our level, very seldom will catchers throw under 2.00 in game situations.

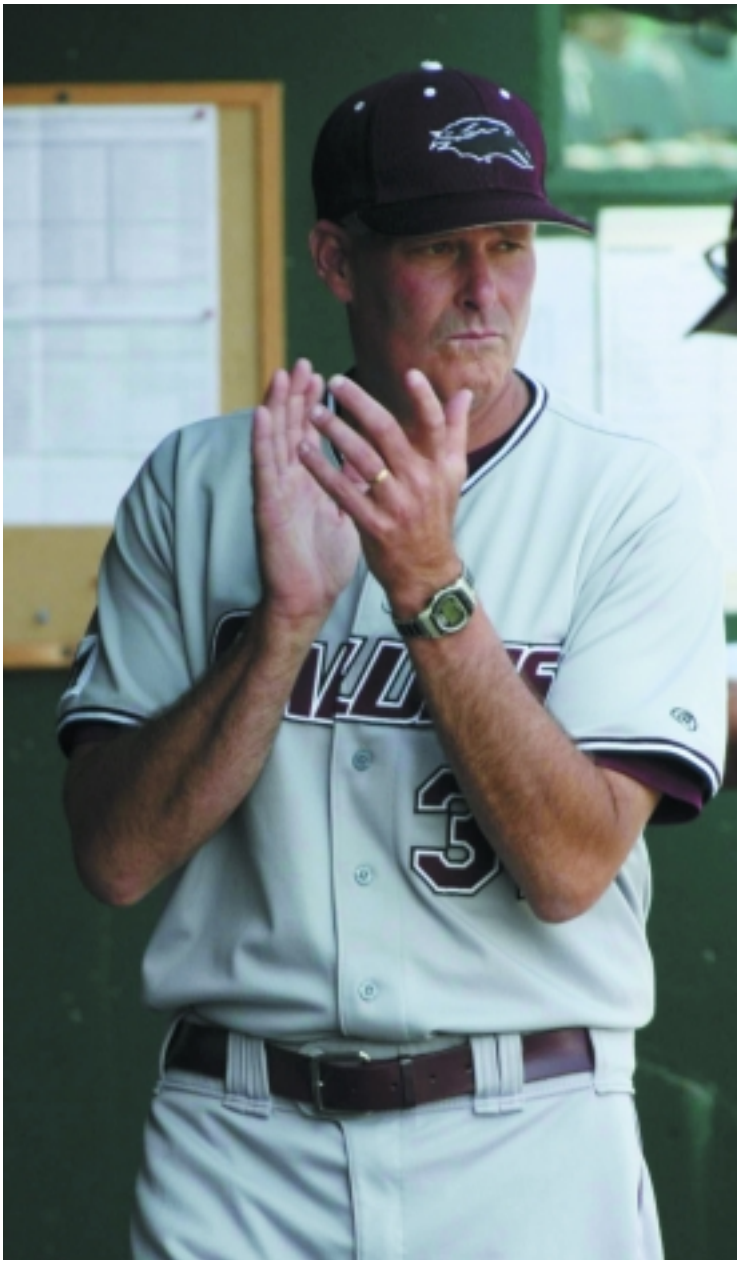
What can we do from a pitching standpoint to help maximize our catcher's ability to throw out a potential runner at second base, or better yet, keep him from running?

As coaches, we want to time each and every throw our catchers make to second base. Yet, often times we allow our pitchers to proceed as they wish. Why don't we slap a stopwatch on our pitchers, too? In our estimation, and granted there are always going to be some variables (How well does our catcher throw? And, how quick is the runner at first base?), most pitchers who are 1.30 or under as far as his delivery from the mound to the plate, are giving their catchers an opportunity to throw out that runner.

If we can get our delivery times closer to 1.20, or even 1.10, our catcher can have minimal arm strength and still have a chance to cut a runner down at second base. Several years ago, we had a RHP whose arm action was shorter than most, but in most instances, he was .95 to 1.05 to the plate. He was impossible to run on! This is an extreme, and we cannot logically expect all of our RHPs to deliver the ball home in around 1.00. But, how can we go from that slow, methodical, high leg kick and times of 1.60, down to that 1.25 – 1.30 range?

I'll try to adequately explain this without getting too complicated. The first thing we probably need to do is videotape our pitchers. Let's start by determining how long a particular pitcher's arm action is. Does he break his hands, and then go out, WAY down, and then up? If that is the case, then maybe we can't expect him to be in that 1.25 range. Since we have to give his arm time to "catch up" and get in the power position, we might expect him to be in that 1.40—1.50 range. In this case, he will have to do a better job of mixing up his looks. He might have to step off on occasion. He might have to "wait…wait…and then step off." He might have to "wait…wait…wait…and then deliver". He might have to quick pitch. Anything to disrupt that runner's timing and/or jump is to a pitcher and catcher's advantage.

In a perfect world, that pitcher's arm is NOT long and methodical. He is somewhat shorter out of the stretch, and he will give his arm a chance to get in a power position much quicker than a pitcher with a long arm. If this is the case, and with a lot of pitchers it is the case, we can utilize what we call a "flex-step" with our lead leg. A flex-step is simply another term for "knee to knee" or to "show the hitter your left rear end cheek." It quickens us up, yet as opposed to a true slide step, it gives our pitcher a chance for his arm to "catch up" and get to that power position, yet still honor the runner at first base. Our pitcher can't get too spread out with his feet as he comes to the set position or his timing home is delayed. On the other hand, he can't get too "narrow" or he won't be able to create adequate balance when he comes knee to knee. It's a fine



line, yet in the end we believe that most pitchers are athletic enough to create that balance.

Once again, with most pitchers, we have found that their arm action is quite subjective. You might have to video tape several different deliveries in order to maximize your pitchers' abilities to quicken themselves up with a runner at first base, while still concentrating on Objective #1: Getting the hitter!

In closing, I'd like to say that shutting down the runner at first base is not as difficult as we might initially think. We don't have to have a great pickoff move; we don't have to have exceptionally quick feet; and we don't have to be unusually quick to the plate. If we can teach our RHPs to mix up their moves and be in that 1.25 range, we've given our catchers an opportunity to throw out a potential base runner; and if you ask most catchers, I think they'd say: "Just give me a chance."