



Dulles  
22923 Quicksilver Drive #115  
Dulles, Virginia 20166  
703-661-8586

info@pinkman.us

www.PinkmanBaseball.com

Collegiate Baseball News  
Patrick Pinkman  
April 4, 2011

## The Gunslinger Move

Anyone that knows me knows that I love playing shortstop, never mind the minor obstacle that I am left-handed. Growing up all I wanted to do was be Cal Ripken Jr, it was my destiny to play shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles. So naturally any chance I got I went to shortstop during batting practice, scrimmages, etc. And EVERYTIME my high school coach and especially my college coach would say "get in the outfield before you get yourself hurt, you're a pitcher." Then I would simply inform them that I was indeed the greatest LH shortstop this or any other world has ever seen. I loved fielding ground balls, going deep into the 5-6 hole laying out for the ball then popping to my knees and whirling a strike to the second baseman. Or catching a back hand top-spinner with teeth and giving the second baseman a glove flip worthy of head nod from the pitcher. That being said, I developed a knack for making quick throws, turning double plays, and making a quick catch and throw as a cutoff man. I actually did enough of this foolery to warrant a career total of 3 innings played at shortstop and a perfect .1000 fielding percentage...1 attempt, 1 put out.

I give you this little piece of background because I believe it was one of the integral parts in providing me the arm action to perform the step off move, or as I like to call it the Gunslinger Move. It is my opinion that one of the main reasons LHPs usually...usually don't throw as hard as RHPs is because of the positions they play when they are not pitching. To my knowledge there is no genetic predisposition as to why a RHP is able to throw harder than a LHP. But growing up, even at the youngest ages, lefties are condemned to first base because the volunteer little league coach knows there are no lefty catchers, second or third basemen, or shortstops in the big leagues "so that's what we're gonna do". I personally think that stunts a lefty's ability to learn the whole game and his throwing motion. When you pigeon hole a lefty to first base the hardest throw they will likely make is usually a ground ball to the third basemen which is almost always a lazy windmill type throw that has no explosiveness and requires no athleticism. If it's not first base then it's to the outfield where a long arm action is promoted and again throws are few and far between aside from the cans of corn thrown to each other in between innings.

This pickoff move, the Gunslinger move, is about 3 things...quick foot work, quick arm action, and ATTITUDE!

## Attitude

The majority of base runners picked off by a bad pickoff move, are bad base runners. You never see a good base runner get picked by a bad move. When I say a bad move I am referring to the dreaded “B move”. Oooooohhh watch out, here comes a subpar attempt at picking you off...(yawn). Think about it, would you ever throw your “B” fastball? Your C+ slider? I didn’t think so. When I picked to first I never wanted an opposing coach to ever say “watch for his good move”, but that’s what I heard every time another lefty was pitching. He would lift up his leg and lazily step to the base and the base runner would be on the bag before the throw was made. Once a pitcher picks to first base with a set up move more attention is paid to him, especially if a pitcher has a reputation for having a great move. I never went over to first base in order to “SET UP” my good move, before the game started the entire team likely knew I had a good pickoff move, that’s what scouting reports are for. If I picked with a set up move everybody in the ball park would know it was my “B” move and would be waiting for my good move. So why do it? I wanted to PICKOFF RUNNERS. PERIOD.

Using the Gunslinger move was my way of setting the tone of the running game that day. Go ahead, step too far off the bag, you feelin’ lucky today? A base runner picked off with the Gunslinger move early in the game establishes control of the running game, gives your team an early added bounce, and sets runners up for the angle move. If your move is good enough it won’t need a “SET UP” move, you will pick the runner off right out of the gate. A true measure of a great pickoff move is still being able to pick off runners even when they know you have one.

## Common Mistakes

*As in my previous article, instead of pictures visit [www.YouTube.com/PinkmanBaseball](http://www.YouTube.com/PinkmanBaseball) for video.*

As with the angle move there are a few things that LHPs do while executing the Gunslinger move that won’t necessarily tip off the move but simply make it ineffective. Two of the most common mistakes that I see LHPs committing are 1. They stop, and 2. They don’t sling it. You may see one of these mistakes at a time, but often one causes the other. Whenever a pitcher is making a throw whether it be a pickoff, a pitch, or a throw from the field, they never stop. There is always a fluid and continual motion, this is essential when executing the gunslinger move. If you ask a LHP to perform a gunslinger type of a throw from the set position, standing still, it will be significantly harder to get velocity on the throw and accuracy will be affected as well. I have worked with 13 year olds, high school and college seniors, and some minor leaguers and not one of them had the arm strength necessary make a throw, from a static position, that will BEAT THE RUNNER. Let me make that clear, they can make the throw to first, but NOT at the velocity needed to pickoff the runner. Using a step off and hold from the set position can be a very effective tool in holding base runners, it can also aid in preventing a runner from stealing on a pitcher’s first movement.

Frequently, when the pitcher does not turn the hips and shoulders enough he will resort back to a more over hand throw thinking this will add velocity, it may add velocity, but again NOT ENOUGH TO BEAT THE RUNNER! The time taken to lift the arm delays the throw and the runner will slide into first base safely. This is where the athleticism of the pitcher can greatly affect his ability to perform this move. Simply put, not every LHP can achieve the necessary speed to make this move what it needs to be, a weapon. Coming to a set position kills speed in this move and the pitcher will have to raise the arm in order to get more power on the throw which will be sluggish. This throw has to be made quickly and from the side, SLING IT!

Earlier I touched on my love of playing shortstop and how I felt it affected my athleticism, this is something I feel very strongly about. I was surprised all through my career that I shocked coaches with my ability to field a bunt, and make an accurate throw to first base or was able to field a comebacker a throw to the base without launching the ball into the cow pastures (Virginia Tech reference). All of you know what I am talking about, what is the first thing the entire team says when the pitcher fields a comebacker? “STEP AND THROW!!!” I’m sure you have seen the handful of pitchers that have so little confidence in their ability to

make an accurate throw to first base they run the ball 70% of the way there then throw the ball underhand. Then step right back onto the mound and paint the outside corner for strike one. It is almost as prevalent as when a ball is hit to the first baseman and the entire dugout, in harmonic unison shouts “GET OVER THERE” to cover first base. I sensed a mode of thinking that I’m sure a lot of you witness still today, some pitcher’s are just not that athletic and I think lefties, fairly or not, are even more so lumped into that mold for the reasons I stated earlier. How athletic do you need to be in order to play first base at the youth level? If you can catch, you’re hired. So when teaching this move I spend a lot of time on the foot work getting the pitcher comfortable with the throw. A 6’ 7” LHP whose arms have a wingspan of 7’ 4” might not be able to execute this move in the manner you want it, that is ok, they can have it as an alternate move but they will have to work on the throw a significant amount. Don’t just teach this move or the angle move for that matter, to a player and expect him to be able to perform it when you snap your fingers, it doesn’t work that way. I remember specific instances where I took off time and had not practiced and turned singles into triples. Practice the moves, work on the throws. Think of how much time they spend pointlessly shagging fly balls or better yet, how much time they waste trying to not run all of their 20+ poles which don’t necessarily add anything to their development. But that’s a topic for another time.

## **The Mechanics of a Quick Step Off Move**

You have to be faster than the base runner. That in a nutshell is the secret to a GREAT Gunslinger move, notice I didn’t say good. As with the angle move, you cannot have an average Gunslinger move. The quicker you get the ball to first base the better, even if it’s ugly. However, accuracy needs to be put at a premium, if you can’t put the ball within a foot of the first basemen’s mitt, the chances of you getting the runner out are slim. You may effectively shorten the runners lead and prevent him from stealing but as earlier stated, “I want that guy off the base as soon as possible.”

### **Foot Work**

The most important mechanical move of the Gunslinger move is the footwork, quick feet = quick hands = quick move. It is the foundation of the move and if the foundation is too slow the rest of the body will behave the same. In the stretch position as the pitcher comes set, they typically bring their hands together as they bring their right foot back slightly to the set position. Of course mound conditions are an issue here, but as the pitcher’s right foot touches the ground to the set position, the left foot then quickly steps back off the rubber, creating a shuffle type of move with the feet. The timing of this shuffle and the hands is very crucial, if the hands come set too soon and come to a pause, momentum is lost. But this foot work needs to be seamless, if a LHP moves his right foot too quickly it can tip off the move. The pitcher should come set in the exact same manner as when he is delivering a pitch. Not only can the foot work tip the move but it can get the pitcher into a poor throwing position where he is moving too much toward second base. When the front foot hits the ground that is the ignition of the move, having control of the left foot stepping back is imperative to providing a solid foundation to the violent throw he is about to make. Weight must be transferred onto the left foot otherwise the throw will not be as quick and accurate as needed.

### **Hips & Shoulders**

Once the pitcher can perform the foot work I tend to stay with the kinetic chain, start at the ground and work up. As earlier stated, if a pitcher stands on the mound, steps off the rubber and attempts a throw there will little velocity. When the left foot steps off the rubber, there has to be a slight hip and shoulder turn in order to get the arm into a stronger slinging position, again if this is done too early the pitcher will be out of position to make a quality throw. How much the hips and shoulders turn is different for each pitcher but they will probably not need to turn so much that the right shoulder is turned directly toward first base. If a throw cannot be made without turning the shoulders entirely in line with first base then it will be more difficult to pick runners off. I want to make sure I stress, this move is meant to remove runners from the base, if that doesn’t happen, keep working on it.

## **The Throw**

The best way I can describe the throw needed to make this move great is if a second baseman, a RH second baseman that is, fields a double play ball away from the bag, either directly at them or a step to their left. When they field the ball, their feet are slightly staggered, they field it, turn their hips and shoulders only and make a quick, short throw to the shortstop. When teaching this throw it is very important to limit full speed throws. Done correctly, with the glove hand in front of the chest, it can and should only be performed between 10-15 times in one practice. You can however work your way up to those with practice throws at a much lower intensity, almost as if the pitchers are just playing catch. The more throws made at this arm angle the more comfortable the pitcher will be performing the move, just not at 100% intensity. Work on the arm angle and the rhythm of the throw and it will become much easier for the pitcher to execute this throw if he has made it 100 times at 50 – 75% versus only 10 throws at 100%.

The arm angle for each pitcher will be slightly different, but as the hands come together in the set position the left elbow is almost always below the hand and the ball. In order for this throw to be made quickly the elbow cannot be directly under the throwing hand, the shoulders will have to tilt and the hand will need to drop below the shoulder, to the side of the elbow. If done correctly, this throw can be made quick enough that the runner will not react until the throw is on the way to the base. If a pitcher can do that he can eliminate, not just control the running game.

Left-handed pitchers have such a distinct advantage when they are on the mound at times it may seem unfair. But only if that pitcher works hard enough to make it that way. If a pitcher can master the art of both the Angle Move and the Gunslinger Move he will be of greater value to the team, be able to throw less pitches, and dominate a good running team.