

# Part Two: Pick-off Moves for Lefthanders

by John and Patrick Pinkman

## The Most Feared Move in Baseball: The LHP Pick to First Base

Nothing can confound an aggressive running game, or devastate a careless one, more than a good left-handed pick-off move—and you either have a good one or none at all.

Here's another news flash: most pick-offs result from bad base running, not innately clever moves. Bad moves do not fool good runners. Don't fret. A good pick-off move is a learned skill, and with practice and the right approach, you can develop one.

We'll focus on two moves: the "no eyes" 45 degree pickoff, and the "gunslinger."

The first step in developing any good move is to get rid of your so-called "set-up move." The set-up is a bad move designed to trick the runner into thinking he's seen your best move. Invariably everybody in the ballpark knows that's *not* your good move. If that is so—and it is—then why do it? If your move is good enough, you won't need a set-up move.

Focus instead on your priorities when a runner reaches first base.

### Priorities

**1. Make a good pitch:** If you can't throw a strike, or if you hit the lady in the concession stand, you'll have more than a runner at first to worry about.

**2. Disturb the runner's lead:** vary the time between the set and the move home. This is especially true for right-handed pitchers.

**3. Shorten the lead:** Make a great move—quick, sudden, unexpected and accurate—to first base.

**4. Remove the runner from the base.**

### Study The Opposition

Knowing something about the runner on first is vital to knowing when and how to pick him off.

How do you know?

There are basically three types of runners. First, the known base stealers ("Big Lead") who will steal anytime because they can. Cocky, aggressive runners are the easiest runners to pick off. Second, are the situational base stealers ("Medium Lead") who have decent speed but take fewer chances. Finally, there are slow guys ("Short Lead") who never steal, are uncomfortable on the bases, and who take short, nervous leads.

**Big Lead:** The runner defines himself as a base stealer. He is aggressive and looking for the "45 move." Early in the game he will take a one-way lead just to see your move, but rather than steal, he is just planning. Use the Gunslinger (step-off) move early in the at bat. This move may be the best bet to pick off this runner.

**Medium Lead:** He's a smart base runner, but not necessarily the fastest. Generally he doesn't get picked off. The pitcher can't be quick enough to use the Gunslinger step-off move, and the runner is smart enough not to take secondary too early. They won't get picked with "45 move" because their first move is most often back to the base or late after you release the ball. As long as the

runner doesn't get a good jump to steal we have done our job.

**Short Lead:** Runners who lack confidence on the bases will make up for a short lead by taking a big secondary lead. The "45 move" is usually the best bet to pick off this runner. Pay no attention to the runner during the at bat; when you, the catcher, or your coach feel the runner is comfortable...pick.

### "NO EYES": The Mechanics of a Good 45 Degree Pick-Off Move

As anyone who has ever fallen victim to it knows, the "no eyes 45," as we call it, is the most feared move in the game. The ultimate goal of this pick-off move is to create a pick-off delivery that mimics the delivery of a pitch. If you achieve this—and you can—you *will* pick runners off.

The timing of the secondary lead, and not the size of the initial lead, is the determining factor in when to attempt a pick-off.

The most important ingredient for a good 45 degree move is consistency of movement. If you are consistent with the movement of your head and lift leg (right leg), and if it looks the same whether pitching or picking off, then you have a solid foundation for a lethal pick-off move.

Start from the stretch position looking at the plate as you come set as in (picture 1.) Pay no attention to the runner on first base at this time. Get your signals and relax. Next, move only your head and look directly into the runner's eyes. 2. Lift your right leg as you would when you throw the pitch home (picture 3). Do not move any part of your lift leg past the rubber; that's a balk, and first base coaches always scream about it. It has no bearing on a good move anyway. Before your lift leg stops moving up, turn and look home and pick up your target (picture 4.) These staggered looks further complicate the

1: Set Position

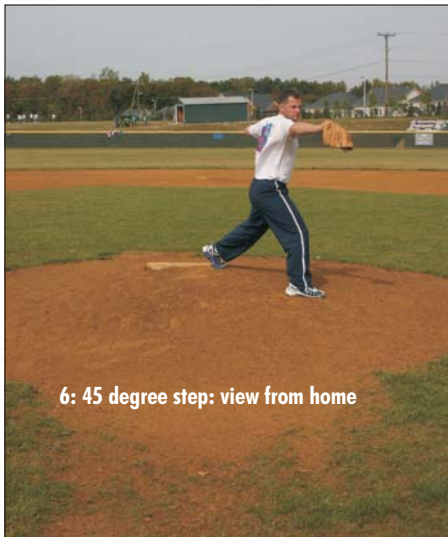
2: Look to first

3: Leg up

4: Look home

5: Step on 45 degree plane





6: 45 degree step: view from home

runner's decisions. Your goal is to make the runner commit to a secondary lead and look home while you are in a position to throw to first.

At this moment your right foot begins to stride on a 45-degree angle between first and home. Move your entire body, not just your leg, down the mound roughly in the direction of the on-deck circle (pictures 5 and 6). The secret to this technique is to move your entire body down the mound as if you were throwing home—not just your leg. As you can see from pictures, it is very difficult to determine where the pitcher is going.

In order to make this move work you must use the same sequence of movements when you pick as when you throw a pitch to the plate. Try videotaping yourself. Compare each movement.

The final part of the move is to continue your motion uninterrupted towards the first base dugout. This is to prevent the opposing coaches from getting a fix on your direction and creating an argument.

Unless it is flagrant, it is very difficult for a two-man umpire crew to assess the angle of a left handed pitcher's movement.

Once you have created consistency with your leg and head, it becomes necessary to do

the same with your arms. However you separate your hands during your normal delivery to the plate is exactly how it should be done in the delivery of a pick-off move.

These movements, done correctly, will give the base runner the impression a pitch is being thrown home.

Think like a base runner. Let's look at several views from the runner's perspective. Field geometry can play tricks on the runner if used creatively.

The pictures below are from the runner's view with a conservative ten-foot lead. Picture 7 shows a good "No Eyes" (45 degree) movement. Picture 8 shows a direct move to home plate. From this angle it is very hard to tell the difference. Picture 9 shows the typical bad lefty move coming straight at you; here it is easy to figure out the pitcher's intention.

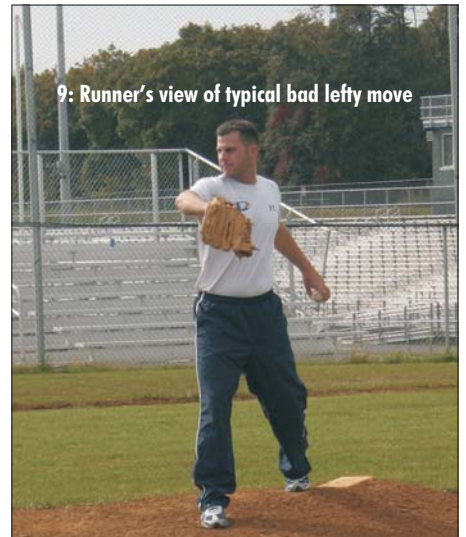
A good "No Eyes" move has one hidden benefit; the hitter may not know which way you are going either. This causes an insecure or at least a hesitant commitment to swing. Often this leads to a ground ball. With the runner hugging the bag at first base, this is an easy recipe for a double play.

### GUNSLINGER: The Mechanics of a quick step-off move

The duel between pitcher and runner is much like the duel between two gunslingers in an old western movie where each says to the other, "let's see how fast you are."

That, in a nutshell, is the secret to a great gunslinger move. As with the No Eyes 45 move, an average gunslinger move will not lead to a pick-off in most cases. However, it is not absolutely necessary to pick someone off to stop the running game.

You must have a step-off move, even if it is a fake motion to prevent the runner from stealing on your first movement. In this instance, at the sight of any motion from the pitcher, the runner will break towards second regardless of whether you throw home or to first. If you throw to home, he has a great jump and an almost one hundred percent

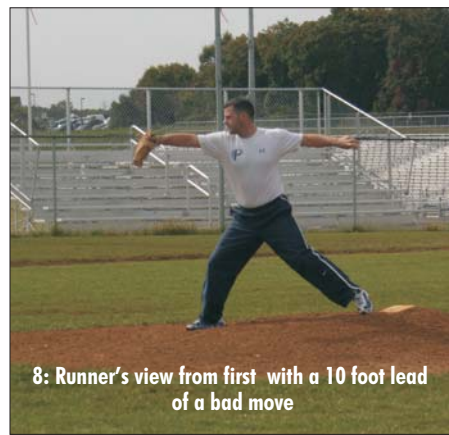


9: Runner's view of typical bad lefty move

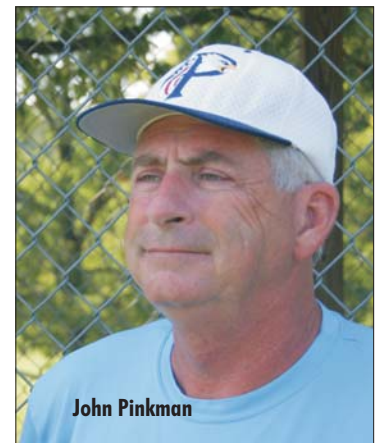
chance of taking second base. If you throw to first, the runner is hoping the first baseman will commit an error (i.e. drop the ball, not get a good grip, make a poor throw). This is known as stealing second on the first



7: Runner's view from first with a 10 foot lead of the direct step to home



8: Runner's view from first with a 10 foot lead of a bad move



John Pinkman

### About Our Contributors

A regular contributor to Collegiate Baseball News, **John Pinkman** is a nationally recognized leader in the field of pitching instruction. According to **Tom House**, "It's obvious that John has taught his students the pitching skills that we require in professional baseball. John is a dedicated student of the game as well as an excellent teacher." Co-author **Patrick Pinkman**, John's son and the model in the photos, pitched for Virginia Tech from 1998 to 2002. He holds that school's record for most pickoffs in a year (19) and most pickoffs in a career (48).

John's instructional facility is located in the Washington, DC area. Designed for serious players, Battery Park™ is a bright, safe indoor environment for elite teams, professional instructors, or father-and-son workouts. The facility is available to rent seven days a week, from early morning to late at night.

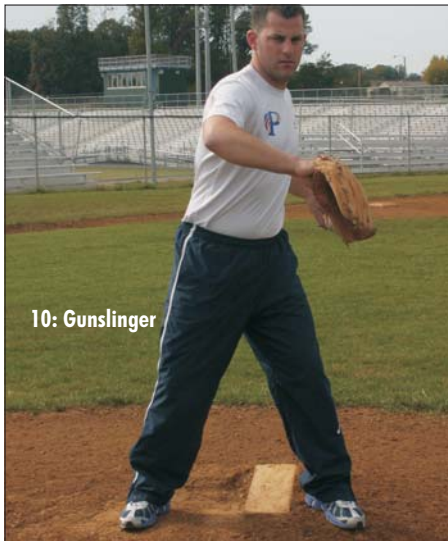
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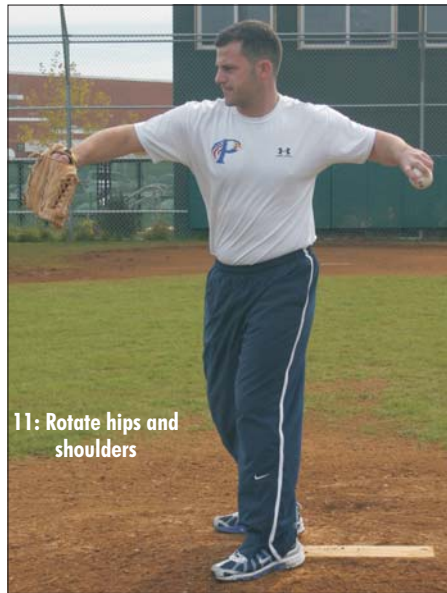
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10: Gunslinger



11: Rotate hips and shoulders



12: Sidearm throw

baseman. If a runner *does* go on your first movement, and you step off, the resulting embarrassment will effectively kill the running on first movement game.

To establish a great Gunslinger move, you must remember two simple things: **speed** and **accuracy**. The quicker you get the ball to first base the better, even if it's ugly. 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. Slow or inaccurate throws may effectively shorten the runner's lead, but will not eliminate the threat.

The Gunslinger move depends on quick feet and quick hands. Start with looking back at picture 1. But as you begin to come set in the stretch, as you bring your right foot to the set position, you quickly step back off the rubber with your left foot (picture 10), creating a shuffle move of sorts. The timing of this move with your hands is crucial; if you

bring your hands set too soon and come to a pause you lose momentum.

Next, rotate your hips and shoulders to gain additional torque, generating speed to the throw as in picture 11. Then use a side-arm throw (picture 12). Now try to imagine this move as if you were pulling your gun out of its holster and firing; hence the term "gunslinger" move.

As you get comfortable with this move, it is fun to experiment with many different looks and sequences. Every pitcher is unique and can bring their own tactics to the mound; but I can't stress enough how vital it is to have a Gunslinger type of move in your arsenal.

### In Conclusion

Learning a great lefty move is intimidating to some lefties. Some are far more confident

in their mediocre move than they should be.

Whether you are a lefty or a righty, not mastering a dominant move is a tactical waste that hurts your team. In the case of the lefty it is a tragedy. A southpaw will literally waste the greatest asset the game has given him.

Be confident you can do it all. We know you can!

**Coming in a future issue: John Pinkman on pick-off moves to second base for BOTH left-handed and right-handed pitchers.**

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