



## **Runlines and How to Bet Them**

**By Hansel Wei**

I've talked about betting major league baseball, and it seems that with the sun out and many ballgames on every day, we should take a more in-depth look at the considerable opportunities for bettors that this sport offers.

Let's quickly recap the idea behind moneylines. When you bet against the spread, you wager either that an underdog will either win outright or lose by less than a certain margin, or that a favorite will win by more than that margin. Against the spread, you generally lay -110 (risk \$110 to win \$100). With moneylines, you either pick the favorite and risk (x) to win \$100, or pick the underdog and risk \$100 to win (x). For instance, with the moneyline New England -160, Indianapolis +140, you could risk \$160 to win \$100 if New England won, or you could risk \$100 to win \$140 if Indianapolis won. The point is, when you bet on a moneyline, you pick which team will win the game outright.

In a sense, runlines combine the two types of wagers. The "spread" is always -1.5 for the favorite. Why, you ask? Since baseball games cannot end in a tie (disregard the All-Star Game two years ago; it doesn't count) a spread of -.5 would have no impact, and because about a quarter of all MLB games are decided by one run, a spread of -1 would result in a push a large portion of the time. Whereas in basketball and football the wager is fixed (-\$110) and the spread moves to balance action, in baseball it is the spread that is fixed (-1.5) and the wager moves depending on which teams are drawing bets. Thus, the favorite is forced to win by two runs. When wagering on runlines, both listed pitchers must start, and the game must go 8.5 innings.

As you can see, the only time there is a difference between the runline and moneyline results for a game is when the favorite wins by exactly one run. In exchange for assuming the extra risk of wagering on a runline favorite (the risk being that they will win by one run only, and thus lose the bet) bettors get a much more lucrative payout than they would on the moneyline. Conversely, while betting the dog gives you a greater likelihood of winning (one-run losses are a winning bet) the payouts are not as large as they would have been if you'd bet the moneyline and your underdog had won outright. Each type of wager will have value in different situations; the key is finding an opportunity to use both types of lines, adding yet another tool to your arsenal. Each can be very effective in the right situation.

Let's look at a few situations where one type of wager or the other would be prudent. We get a lot of runline action on the favorites in big spreads. If you expect Dontrelle Willis and the Marlins to blow out the Royals by five runs, why risk \$300 to

win \$100 on the moneyline when you could bet them at -1.5 (-160), nearly cutting your risk in half? However, if you think a game will be close but you're confident one team will win, or you're confident the underdog will win outright, perhaps the moneyline is the way to go.

Make sure you're maximizing the resources available to you. Take a look at stats that other bettors won't even think about. For instance, every bettor with internet access has access to a team's record in one-run games, but very few take advantage of this useful tool. Who would have guessed that at the time this article was written, the Washington Nationals, only 3-3 in extra inning games, would be a startling 17-7 in one-run games? Check out the expanded standings at ESPN.com for all these details and more.

Finally, I should mention that on occasion you'll find a player trying to guarantee himself a profit by betting the favorite on the runline and the underdog on the moneyline in the same game. For example, if the Cubs are -1.5 (+120) on the runline and the Mets are +160 on the moneyline, betting \$100 on both would guarantee a profit of either \$20 or \$60 as long as the Cubs don't win by a single run (resulting in a loss of \$200). This tactic can be extremely risky, and while there is only one outcome that will result in a loss, you stand to lose much more than you stand to win. If you're confident a runline favorite won't win by a single run though, then you may want to consider trying this crafty maneuver. Look for teams with very few one-run games. At this point in time, the Yankees, for instance, have only had 10 of their 68 games end with a margin of one run.

Runlines are growing in popularity, but for many years, have played second fiddle to moneylines. This is in large part due to the fact that many bettors simply do not understand how runlines work and when they give the bettor an advantage. By educating yourself as to their value, you open up a huge opportunity for wagers that can considerably add to one's bankroll.

**Until next time, do yourself a favor...**

**Keep doing things Hansel's Wei.**