

Correct Pitching Mechanics by Playing Catch

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While being involved in public education for the past twenty years, I have come to accept the constant scrutiny in teaching techniques. There always seems to be pressure to come up with a better way to educate today's youth; invariably, the public asks educators to get back to basics. I believe there is the same pressure in athletics for better teaching techniques. While reflection is a necessary component in coaching any sport, coaches make the teaching of baseball fundamentals more difficult than necessary. This phenomenon is especially true when it comes to pitching.

The most important aspect in pitching is throwing strikes consistently. In order to help young pitchers throw strikes, teach them how to play catch correctly. We have all admired how effortlessly Greg Maddux makes pitching appear. When in a groove, Maddux is so effortless with his mechanics that he merely seems to be playing catch. By aiding young pitchers in becoming simplified and effortless in mechanics, they will not only throw strikes more consistently, but also will develop confidence in their ability.

When evaluating a pitcher's mechanics, watch them warm up in a rather informal setting. While observing, look to see whether the following five principles of good throwing technique are being used:

1. Eyes are constantly on the target.
2. The athlete should be in a good goal post position, meaning both glove side elbow and throwing elbow should be as high as his shoulder.
3. The ball should be pointed back to allow for the rotation of the hips.
4. Glove side shoulder and foot should be pointed directly at the target.
5. Weight transfer and follow-through from post foot to glove side foot.

Pitchers seem to run into the most difficulty when applying the simple throwing technique in a pitching situation. Alleviate some of their anxiety by asking them to throw batting practice in the same way they play catch. Pitchers can experiment playing catch with the catcher in this batting practice setting.

When put into a live pitching situation, many problems occur in adding the windup. It is important, at this point, to stress that the windup does nothing to affect the eventual success of a pitch; however, it can be a reason for the failure of that same pitch. Try to simplify the delivery of any pitcher who has difficulty throwing strikes.

After the drop step that propels the pitching sequence, all other mechanics of the pitching delivery are like playing catch. Encourage pitchers to use a six-inch drop step directly perpendicular to the pitching rubber. Then it is just step and throw.

Pitchers learn change-ups, curves, sliders and all other pitches by playing catch. There is no better way to get the feel of a new pitch than by throwing it for ten or fifteen minutes

at a time in a non-pitching situation. As the coach, it is important to stress throwing each pitch with the same mechanics and arm speed.

For early season arm conditioning, playing catch can aid in gradually building the pitcher's arm without their trying to overthrow; they tend to do so when throwing off an indoor mound too soon. Set up a program where they throw for thirty minutes every other day in the following manner:

>>>>> Coach JP's Note: The author coaches college - level athletes. Our readers range from youth levels to College. Consider age and skill level you are participating in; Some pitches below may not be appropriate...Keep 'Em Safe!!

Pitchers play catch with pitchers all at the same time, whether inside the gym or in a parking lot outside - if the weather is not conducive to using the field. Athletes will throw in five-minute intervals in the following sequence:

1. Five minutes - warm-up.
2. Five minutes - four-seam fastballs.
3. Five minutes - change-ups.
4. Five minutes - alternate fastball grips.
5. Five minutes - spinning curve balls. (Partly paint balls to clearly show the rotation to pitchers.)
6. Five minutes - alternating from fastball to change-up to curve.

Increase or decrease times in this program to each individual pitcher's needs. After four or five sessions, pitchers should be ready to pitch batting practice or to throw to a catcher off the mound.

There is no one method to correct all pitching mechanics. However, this way is very helpful, not only in correcting mechanic flaws, but also by conditioning pitchers' arms in early spring to avoid nagging sore arms.

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