

Pitching Practice

FLAT GROUND SPOT WORK

At UCLA, our pitchers go through a thorough stretching and warm up routine each day of practice. That warm up is followed by long toss to strengthen their arms. This drill is designed to reinforce a pitcher's proper release point, as well as work on locating their pitches, after playing loss toss.

When extending the distance between partners in a game of long toss, a player's release point moves back, closer to their head in an effort to get enough air under the ball to reach their partner. Some coaches argue that the maximum length at which two players should play long toss, is a length at which the players can throw the ball on a relatively flat line. This keeps a player's release point out in front of the body and avoids putting extra stress on the shoulder that is present when a player releases the ball at an upward angle.

When our pitchers finish playing long toss, they work their way back to about 50 feet and finish by taking turns throwing to a squatting partner. This serves two purposes:

- First, it re-establishes a solid release point, out in front of the body and with a downward plane.
- Secondly, it is a good drill to work on maintaining your feel and spotting your pitches.

Our pitchers take turn throwing 4-6 pitches each, beginning with fastballs and working in change-ups and curveballs. We work on hitting spots, inside and outside, and executing proper release point to get a good downward plane. Rotate several times between pitcher and catcher, but be sure not to overthrow. Done most likely at the beginning of practice, it is important not to throw too much during this drill, in order to be ready to throw during practice.

Submitted by: Coach Adams

CONTROL

Pitchers and catchers stand at regulation distance from each other. The catcher stands behind home plate, and a batter stands in the batter's box. The batter should alternate between a left and right-handed batting stance after every five pitches, but not take any swings. The catcher calls balls and strikes. Have the batter wear a helmet in this practice situation. This game like drill will help your pitchers develop a consistent pitching motion, get a good feel for the strike zone, and get use to pitching with a player in the batter's box.

[Coach Don's Baseball Page](#)

Submitted by: [Coach Don](#)

FOOT STRIKE DRILL

Purpose: This drill teaches the pitchers to land on the instep of their stride foot. This important action forces the hips closed and produces pitchers with exceptional control, great power and health arms.

The Drill: The pitcher places their posting foot on top of an elevated object (a 4X4, a step, a rock, etc.) From this position, the pitcher strides forward. As soon as the stride foot hits the ground, the pitcher bounces back to tap their stride foot on the object supporting their posting foot. The pitcher repeats the stride/tap motion as many times in 20 seconds as possible.

Result: In order to quickly bounce back to tap their stride foot under their posting foot, the pitcher is required to land on their toes and instep. With daily practice, this action becomes automatic, becomes natural for the pitcher. This mechanic gives the pitcher the pitching power and control needed to excel on the mound.

Coach's Checkpoint: When the pitcher's stride foot lands, the pitcher's stride knee is slightly bent and ahead of an imaginary line drawn from the stride ankle to the stride hip.

Added Value: More advanced pitchers stride on an imaginary line from the posting foot to the target.

Submitted by: [L.A. "Skip" Fast](#)

THE BALANCE

Can be done either from the windup or the stretch, from the full distance to the plate. The idea is to have the pitcher hit his apex in the leg kick, and then stop and hold his balance for a few seconds (time varies with each different pitch), then finish the delivery. If he loses balance, he does not throw the ball. If he holds his balance well, all his body weight will be able to go towards the plate, and he will also have a smooth delivery as well.

This is a major factor in improving control problems.

Submitted by: [Ron Barthle](#)

WEIGHT BACK

To alleviate "rushing the lower body" and develop a good rhythm and pace.

From the wind-up position have the pitcher rock, turn and raise his leg to the balance position. But instead of either stopping or going on to pitch, he now lowers that leg to the ground next to and immediately behind the pivot foot. He should now be standing facing either 3b (rh) or 1b (lh), in good balance before beginning. Now he simply reraises the non-pivot foot and pitches. This simple drill keeps the weight back while in the wind-up. Once the pitcher gets used to it, he can develop a nice natural flow, rock,turn,raise, drop,raise and pitch. Then alternate the drill every other pitch. Pitchers who are comfortable with it can even do it between innings for a pitch or two just to reinforce their proper piece and keep from rushing.

Submitted by: [Marshall Erickson](#)

GARY ADAMS' TIP OF THE MONTH MARCH 2000 Strengthen and Preserve Your Arm

Due to the fact that in past years too many of our players (pitchers and position players alike), were coming up with arm injuries that prevented them from practicing or competing in games, I initiated a new throwing program at UCLA this year.

The reasons for our problem were two-fold:

1. We were not devoting enough time to throwing.
2. We did not have a systematic plan for throwing.

Before this year, we were spending only 10 to 15 minutes per day of haphazard throwing. That just doesn't get it done when it comes to strengthening your arm and or preventing injuries. So, with the advice and suggestions from Alan Jaeger, one of the nation's leading experts on throwing, we implemented a new throwing program this fall that has, thus far, solved our problems. Furthermore, it has definitely improved the accuracy, velocity and distance of all of our players throwing ability.

In general, this is how our throwing program works in chronological order:

1. Twenty minutes of stretching the entire body, including arms, legs and torso.
2. Ten minutes of internal and external arm circles to warm-up and strengthen the rotator cuff muscles, which are so crucial to every players arm.
3. Ten minutes of "tubing exercises." Every one of our players has his own personal surgical tubing that he is required to bring to practice daily- just like his glove or bat.
4. Ten minutes of the "Mechanics Drill." Starting at about 40-50 feet apart and increasing to 70 feet apart, players play "loose and relaxed" catch with their stride foot already planted forward, and their back foot square (as if against the rubber). The front foot should be pointed at 75' (degrees) and each player throws to their partners' opposite knee (to guarantee a proper follow through).
5. Fifteen to twenty minutes of long toss. Partners gradually increase the distance, beginning at about 70 feet. They begin with a normal step and throw, but as they increase the distance between each other, they throw using a balanced position and a "crow-hop." The final distance of the long toss depends upon each individual's strength and condition. Our players at UCLA, when

in top form, long toss from 250' to 300' at their peak distance. After the partners reach their peak distance, they then gradually work their way closer to their partner until they are at about 70' again. Two important rules to remember when long tossing are:

- a. Use exactly the same arm speed and effort while throwing both at your "peak" distance, and at your minimal distance.
- b. Always stay mechanically sound and do not over exert- stay loose and relaxed.

After our players finish their long toss workout, they run at least one complete lap around the field and then jump into practice immediately. By increasing the players' heart rate and activity level, this helps to promote better circulation and ultimately improves their recovery rate. Next month, I will talk in more detail about our arm circles routine and our specific tubing exercises. Until then, whether you are a pitcher or a position player, remember: Your arm is your future! Make the time to take good care of it.

Submitted by: UCLA Head Coach Gary Adams

THE "L" THEORY

I use what is called the "L" Theory for our pitching staff and for our catchers to call signs. I feel that using the "L" plays a vital role in preparing our pitchers to hit spots in a tight situation. Taking into account the goal of either notching a "K," causing a pop up, or inducing a ground out, mastering the disciplines of the "L" Theory will ensure confidence and execution under pressure.

Just as there are different theories of how to mix your pitchers, there are many schools of thought as to when to throw to respective locations. The "L" Theory can be an effective tool to teach location regardless of a coach's pitching philosophy. Both the catcher and the pitcher will learn the value of moving locations, and be on the same page as far as locating targets, and recognizing mistakes.

As a pitcher, imagine you are on the mound and you are facing a right-handed batter. Imagine further an "L" shape area from the shoulder down to the shin, and out across the plate to the outside corner. Yes, the "L" is backwards in the manner you are looking at, but it does reverse for a left-handed batter. From that shoulder area down to about the waist is Zone #1. From the waist down to the shin area or below the knees, is Zone #2. These two zones are on the inside half of the plate areas. Zone #3 is down and outside around the outside corner of the plate.

On our squad, we throw to Zones #2 and #3 primarily, and use Zone #1 if we want to 'nibble' or waste a pitch. We ONLY throw to these 3 spots and nowhere else. We never throw a ball out over the plate that is thigh or belt high. We also NEVER throw a strike in the zone when the count is 0-2 or our pitchers pay at the end of the game. At our level and down, most hitters do not have the discipline to stay back and hit the ball the other way. Even if they do, most often they only discipline their hands, and not their hips and legs. So we like to do a lot of pitching to Zone #3 because we get weak ground balls to either side of the diamond, or pop ups to the right side assuming a RH batter. Then, of course we change speeds. I believe that an above average high school pitcher can dominate games if disciplined on hitting spots with varying velocities.

Adjust this plan to your specific liking and experiment with your pitchers. When practiced religiously, the "L" Theory can be very effective. Best of luck!

Submitted by: [CoachB](#)