

THE PITCHING GAME ... Some things to consider:

Practice pitching. A pitcher only gets better by throwing. Have them use the drills and work off the mound. Being an effective pitcher, being able to have control, can't happen by throwing once a week. Pitchers must do their "pitching homework" in order to improve.

Build arm strength. Long toss is critical for building arm strength for every position player on the team. Work on accuracy (Aim for the chest of your teammate), velocity (no rainbows), and distance

Field the position. Pitching to the plate is just one part of the equation. Once a pitcher releases the ball, he becomes the 5th infielder. Make sure they know the situation and where to go with the ball when it is hit.

Examples:

****** Any ball hit to the right side of the infield requires the pitcher to break to cover 1st automatically.

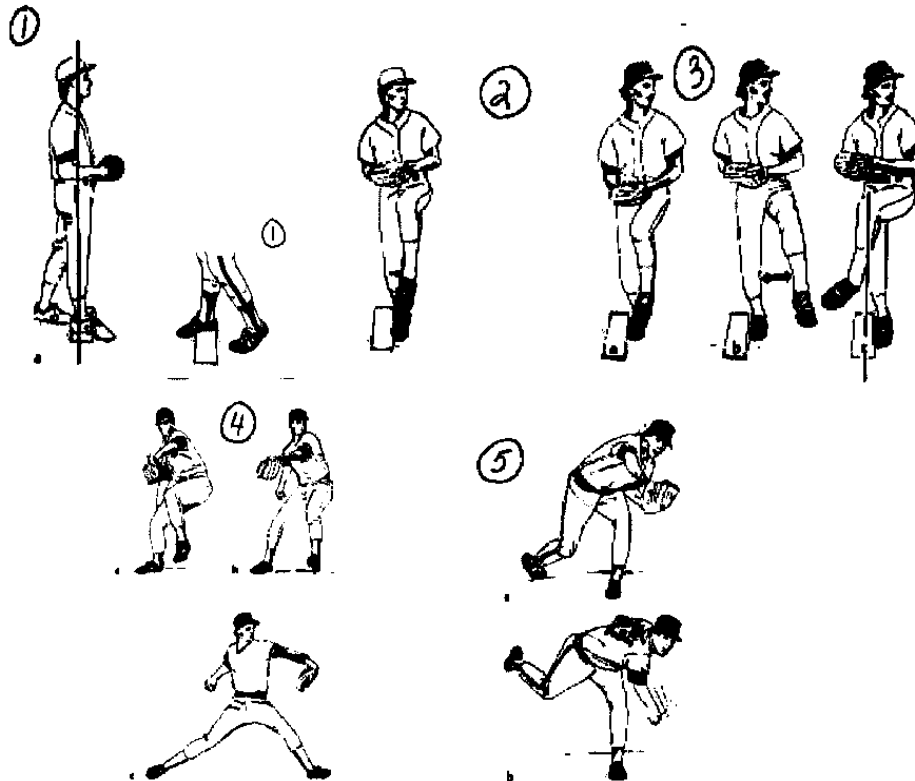
****** Whenever a runner is on third base, it is the pitcher's responsibility to cover home on any ball that goes by the catcher. (If you've watched enough games in Little League, you realize that this is the main source of run production.)

****** Field bunts and comebackers. Never barehand the ball unless it has come to a complete stop.

Get that first strike in on the batter. This gives the pitcher a tremendous advantage to be ahead in the count. Walks are poison. Not only do they give the opposition baserunners, but walks tax your player's arm and bore their defensive teammates to death. The old baseball adage is "you can't catch a walk." Let them hit it. Really. The odds are in favor of the defense 9 to 1 when the ball goes into play.

The 5 Steps of Pitching

1. Baby Rocker Step (4-6 inches)
2. The Pivot
3. Balance Point
4. Stride and Release
5. Follow Through (Extend to plate, finish low)



The Stretch Position Some pitchers may feel uncomfortable using the 5 steps. In youth leagues, children may lack the strength, balance and coordination to master the proper wind-up, pivot and delivery.

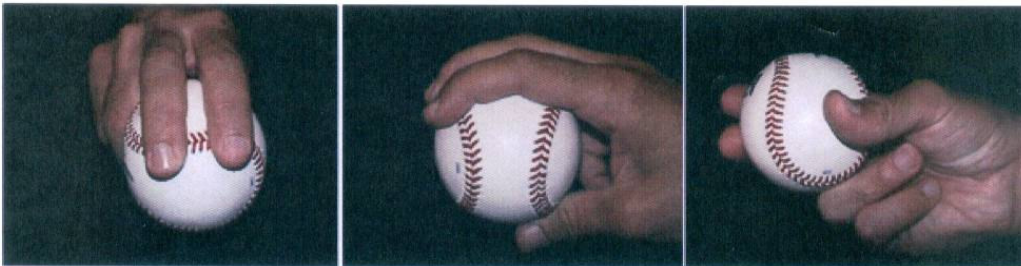
Set the pitcher up on the rubber, feet spread shoulder width apart, with their front shoulder facing home plate. Have the pitcher raise his hands, while bringing his front foot back to the rubber. When the pitcher has come set, he strides toward the plate and delivers the pitch. What we have done is to eliminate steps 1 & 2. We have reduced the delivery to a 3-step process. Keep it simple! With fewer components to the delivery, there is less chance for breakdowns and mistakes. Consider that today there are increasing numbers of major league relievers who never pitch from a wind-up and go exclusively from the stretch.

How To Grip And Throw A Four Seam Fastball

To grip the four seam fastball, place your index and middle fingertips directly on the perpendicular seam of the baseball. The "horseshoe seam" should face into your ring finger of your throwing hand (as shown in the picture on the left). I call it the horseshoe seam simply because the seam itself looks like the shape of a horseshoe.

Next, place your thumb directly beneath the baseball, resting on the smooth leather (as shown in the picture on the right). Ideally, you should rest your thumb in the center of the horseshoe seam on the bottom part of the baseball.

Grip this pitch softly, like an egg, in your fingertips. There should be a "gap" or space between the ball and your palm (as shown in the middle picture). This is the key to throwing a good, hard four-seam fastball with maximal backspin and velocity: A loose grip minimizes "friction" between your hand and the baseball. The less friction, of course, the quicker the baseball can leave your hand.



Keys to the 4 Seam Grip

- Will fly the straightest of all grips
- Works as a fundamental grip for fielders
- Only hold it with your fingers
- Practice taking the ball out of your glove with cross seam grip

How To Grip And Throw A Two Seam Fastball

A two seam fastball, much like a sinker or cutter (cut fastball), is gripped slightly tighter and deeper in the throwing-hand than the four-seam fastball. This pitch generally is thought of as a "movement pitch" (as opposed to the four-seam fastball, which is primarily thought of as a "straight pitch").

When throwing a two-seam fastball, your index and middle fingers are placed directly on top of the narrow seams of the baseball (as shown in the picture on the left).

Next, place your thumb directly on the bottom side of the baseball and on the smooth leather in between the narrow seams (as shown in the picture on the right).

Again, a two seamer is gripped a little firmer than the four seamer. A firm grip causes friction, which causes the baseball to change direction, usually "backing up" - or running in - to the throwing hand side of the plate. It also slightly reduces the speed of the pitch, which is why most two-seamers register about 1 to 3 mph slower than four-seam fastballs.

One hint with this pitch is to always throw the two-seam fastball to the throwing-hand side of the plate and my four seam fastball to the glove-hand side of the plate. In other words, if you are a righty, throw two-seamers inside to right-handed batters and four-seamers away.



Keys to the 2 Seam Grip

- Will move if thrown correctly
- Change the thumb position to experiment
- Only hold it with your fingers
- Hold it tighter than the 4 seam grip
- Ball is held further back in the hand

How To Grip And Throw A Three Finger Change-up

A three-finger changeup is a good off-speed pitch for younger baseball pitchers – and for those who do not have big hands.

To throw an effective three-finger changeup, center your ring, middle, and index fingers on top of the baseball (as shown in the third picture at right). Your thumb and pinky finger should be placed on the smooth leather directly underneath the baseball (as shown in the middle picture).

It helps to develop a good "feel" for the pitch, which is important since the changeup is a finesse pitch.

OK, now that you've got your grip, hold the baseball deep in the palm of your hand to maximize friction and to "de-centralize" the force of the baseball when the pitch is released. This helps take speed off of the pitch. Throw it like you would a fastball: Same mechanics. Same arm speed. Same everything.

One way to develop "fastball mechanics" but changeup speed is to practice throwing your changeup as you long toss (throwing beyond 90 feet). Alternate fastballs and changeups at 90-or-more feet for about 20 throws a couple of times a week.



