

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:

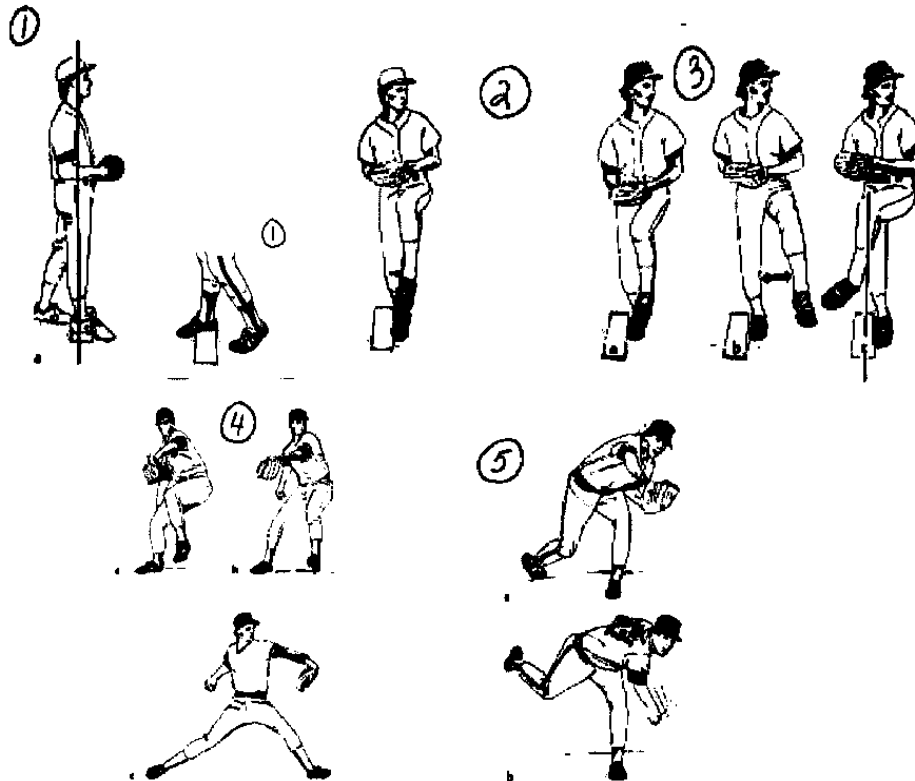
- ** Any ball hit to the right side of the infield requires the pitcher to break to cover 1st automatically.
- ** Whenever a runner is on third base, it is the pitcher's responsibility to cover home on any ball that goes by the catcher. (If you've watched enough games in Little League, you realize that 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.

Coaches count pitches. Particularly early in the season. Do not over-work young arms. Get into the practice of splitting games with your pitchers. Their arms are not ready for heavy workloads. Use 3 pitchers in a game (just like you would do with your rightfielders). Arms stay fresh. Pitchers can come back later in the week and they will thrive on the regular work rather than appearing just once a week. This requires coaches to pay less attention to the scoreboard, but it will help to develop and preserve pitchers. As the weather gets warmer and the pitchers stronger, you can then stretch the innings out. Remember, count pitches not innings. Rule of thumb: Start the kids at 30 - 35 pitches and then add in increments of ten. Signs of fatigue include: shortness of breath, loss of control, pitches

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.

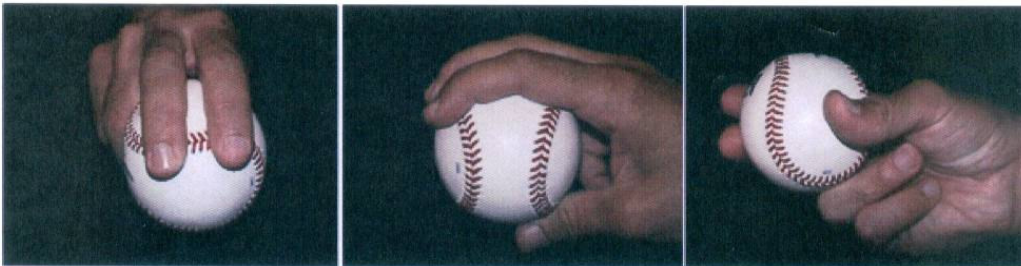
Set the pitcher up on the rubber, feet spread shoulder width apart, with their front shoulder facing home plate. Have the pitcher raise his hands, while bringing his front foot back to the rubber. When the pitcher has come set, he strides toward the plate and delivers the pitch. What we have done is 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.



THROWING



COACHING NOTES

ALIGNMENT

Align shoulders and hips to target. Weight on balls of feet. Hands brought to center of body.

SEPARATION/EXTENSION

Step and separate hands with thumbs under. Front shoulder and elbow aligned. Back elbow at shoulder height, palm facing away.

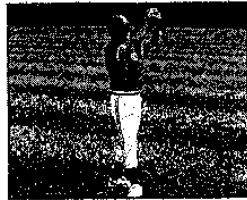
DRIVE TO TARGET

Push off back leg. Hips and shoulders rotate. Upper body pulls down with head over bent front leg, weight on ball of front foot.

DRILL PURPOSE

Demonstrate fundamentals of the throwing motion.

SQUARE OFF



KEY PHRASE:

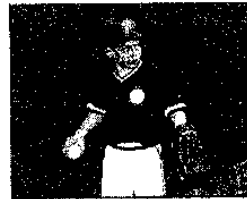
Align As You Catch



- 1 Pair up without gloves, 20 feet apart.
- 2 Teammates toss underhand.
- 3 Players concentrate on catching the ball and aligning to target.

- ✓ Stop and turn foot as you catch (RH right foot forward, LH-left foot).
- ✓ Hands to center of body.
- ✓ Feet and shoulders aligned to target.

TOUCH FENCE



Thumbs Under, Elbows Up



- 1 Players pair up with gloves.
- 2 One teammate sets up just short of arm's length from fence.
- 3 Player by fence separates ball from glove and extends ball to fence, then steps and throws.

- ✓ Separate hands with thumbs under.
- ✓ Both elbows come to shoulder height.
- ✓ Ball touches fence with hand behind ball.

HEAD OVER HEELS



Stomach Crunch, Head Over Knee



- 1 One player kneeling, throwing to standing teammate.
- 2 Execute upper body movement to standing teammate.
- 3 Move to standing position, push off back leg against bent front leg, follow through.

- ✓ Pull down and across when throwing (player should feel stomach and back muscles).
- ✓ Head extended over front knee as player follows through.
- ✓ Back leg comes through to just past parallel position.



T H R O W I N G



CROW HOP

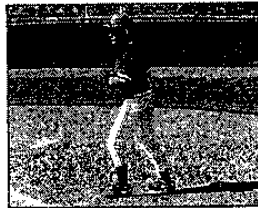
COACHING NOTES

POWER THROW

For longer throws, move to ball for momentum. Crow hop to get body motion into throw.

DRILL PURPOSE

Footwork for long throws.



KEY PHRASE:

Hop with Back Foot



- ✓ Players pair up with 1 player close to chalk line.
- ✓ Draw another parallel line 1 1/2 to 2 feet in front.
- ✓ Player starts with front foot (left for RH, right for LH) on line.

- ✓ Hop with back foot to chalk line (RH with right foot, LH with left foot).
- ✓ Stop with other foot to throw to teammate.
- ✓ Rotate after 10 throws.

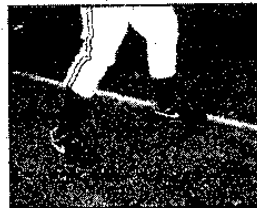
COACHING NOTES

QUICK TRANSFER AND RELEASE THROW

Throws of shorter distance require less body momentum. Shuffle feet and release ball quickly.

DRILL PURPOSE

Footwork for shorter throws.



KEY PHRASE:

Back Foot Replaces Front Foot



- ✓ Pair up about 30 feet apart.
- ✓ Stand with left foot in front of the other (LH - right foot).
- ✓ Use shuffle to throw.

- ✓ Back foot shuffles to position of front.
- ✓ Front foot steps toward target to throw.

SHUFFLE

Pg. 28

THROWING



SEAMS NATURAL

Pg 28

COACHING NOTES

GRIP

Develop sensitivity for accuracy. Fingers on top of ball and thumb under ball. Firm, not tight pressure.

HAND POSITION

Directly behind ball. Throw the "top" of the ball with wrist snap.

SEAMS

4 seam (least action).
2 seam across (more).
2 seam with (most).

DRILL PURPOSE

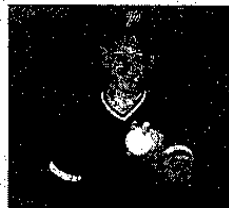
Develop proper grip/sensitivity to ball.



KEY PHRASE:

"Cross Seams"

"With Seams"



- ✓ Hold glove hand in front with ball, throwing hand behind.
- ✓ Coach calls out "seams" or "cross seams".
- ✓ Advance to playing catch and throwing cross seams without looking.
- ✓ Next draw circle around ball, fingers on each side of circle.

- ✓ Player transfers ball behind back, finds seams and presents ball in front.
- ✓ Check for proper grip.
- ✓ Player tries to improve quickness.
- ✓ With circle, player throws "top" of ball (look for proper backspin).

COACHING NOTES

BASERUNNER

Force back to base of origin. Commit runner to base.

FUNDAMENTALS

Hold ball up, throw like dart. Receiver shortens distance and moves to throwing side of thrower. Chest-high throws and rotate out of baseline to throwing side.

PLAYER ASSIGNMENTS

Ball between 1B and 2B
Primary: 1B and SS
Secondary: P and 2B
Ball between 2B and 3B
Primary: 2B or SS and 3B
Secondary: SS or 2B and P
Ball between 3B and home
Primary: 3B and C
Secondary: SS and 1B or P

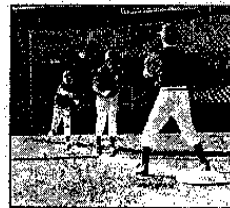
DRILL PURPOSE

Learn to execute rundown throws.

RUNDOWN



Hold Ball Up, Make Runner Commit



- ✓ Group of 5 (1B, C, 3B, SS and Runner). Make sure runner wears helmet. Set up at 3B. Also practice at other bases with appropriate players.
- ✓ Start with ball at base, runner leading off.
- ✓ Runner competes against defense (maximum of 4 throws). Rotate after each turn.

- ✓ Hold ball up (no faking).
- ✓ Force runner to run hard to next base.
- ✓ Throw and rotate out to throwing side.



