



MY FIRST PITCH



*Mechanics and Drills Inspired from Tom House
and the National Pitching Association.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS

PAGE

Teaching young pitchers the stretch position vs full wind-up	2
Gripping the baseball	3
Set up on the mound	3
Beginning momentum towards home plate	4
Stride	5
Landing front foot	7
Releasing the baseball	8
Follow through	11
Coaching points	12
Drills to emphasize Good Pitching Mechanics for youth <i>Inspired from Tom House and NPA</i>	13
Compare the youth pitcher and the professional	17



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TEACHING YOUNG PITCHERS THE STRETCH POSITION vs FULL WIND-UP



The “stretch position” simplifies the delivery for the young pitchers. The focus on the stretch position as all young pitchers have to think about is “lift and move towards home”. In the full wind up there are a few more steps which may cause the young pitcher to lose balance and cause control problems.

The stretch position is used in the big leagues and other higher levels of baseball almost exclusively when there are runners on base. When there are no runners on base, often pitchers at the higher levels will go into the “full wind up” as it feels more natural. Generally, pitchers do not lose any power using the stretch position. If you have a pitcher who is comfortable with the full wind up and the pitcher has good command of his/her pitches, then you may not want to intervene.



Full wind-up position (chest facing home)



Stretch position (back foot against rubber, not on top of rubber). From this position the pitcher can lift his front leg and thrust toward home delivering a pitch.

Notes:



GRIPPING THE BASEBALL



Keep it simple when it comes to gripping the baseball. Pitchers at this stage can use a 2 finger, 3 finger or even a 4 finger grip on the baseball. Whatever feels comfortable for the child is recommended. Be sure that the player has the middle finger and the thumb centre the ball or “split the ball in half.” The coach should look for the thumb directly underneath the centre of the baseball. If the thumb is off centre of the ball, control problems for the young pitcher will be the result. The middle finger should be directly on top. Also, pitchers are encouraged not to grip the ball too tight by leaving space between the ball and the back of the hand. We want to hold the ball firm but not tight – muscles perform better when relaxed.



Notes:



SET UP ON THE MOUND

Right handed Pitcher (RHP):

Start with the right foot (pivot foot) on the front edge of the rubber not on top of the rubber and their back facing first base. The left foot (stride foot) is in front of the pivot foot.

Left handed Pitcher (LHP):

Start with left foot (pivot foot) on the front edge of the rubber and not on top and your back facing third base. The right foot (stride foot) is in front of pivot foot.

Setup on the mound (continued)

- Feet should be shoulder width apart as this will provide proper balance when they transition to the leg lift.
- Ensure their weight is distributed equally on both feet with knees bent. Emphasize the proper athletic position.
- The chin should be lined up with the front shoulder of the glove hand.
- Bring hands together in the area between your chest and belly-button and maintain a comfortable and loose grip on the baseball in the glove.

Notes:



BEGINNING MOMENTUM TOWARDS HOME PLATE



After the player is in a good setup position he/she should shift their weight to their back foot and lift their front leg up and **slightly** back towards their throwing arm shoulder while directing his/her front hip towards home plate – lift and thrust towards home!

Coaches should emphasize as the player is lifting their front leg, the pitcher should “lead with their butt or back pocket” in order to generate good momentum towards home plate.



Leading with “back pocket” towards home. Pitchers pictured are creating a good energy angle towards home.





Beginning momentum towards home plate (continued)

Coaches should watch for head movement from the young pitcher. When the pitcher lifts their leg the head should stay over their belly button. If the head gets outside of the body (head tilts towards 1st or 3rd base) balanced is compromised and control will suffer.

Still leading with the back pocket as the pitcher strides towards home creating good energy and momentum.



Notes:



STRIDE

- Player should direct stride foot towards home plate.
- As player is striding towards home the pitcher can start taking the baseball out of their glove.
- Coaches should look for the glove side elbow to match the throwing side elbow. The glove side arm should mirror the throwing side arm as the player strides toward target. The arms provide balance as the pitcher strides toward target. Think of a tight rope walker using his arms for balance.



Pitcher is striding towards target and the glove is pointing towards target.

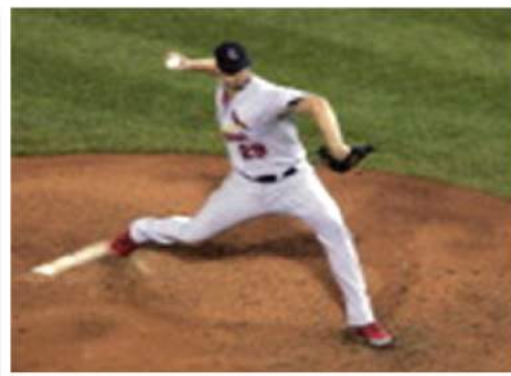
Notes:

Stride (continued)

Backside view – the throwing elbow matches the glove elbow – this provides the pitcher with balance as they continue their momentum towards home.



Notice the shoulders are slightly torqued right before the front foot lands. Some pitchers use more torque and others use less. Again, the angle of the throwing elbow matches the angle of the glove side elbow.



The arms are not "locked" or straight when the front foot lands.

Pitcher's glove side elbow is the mirror image to the throwing side elbow.



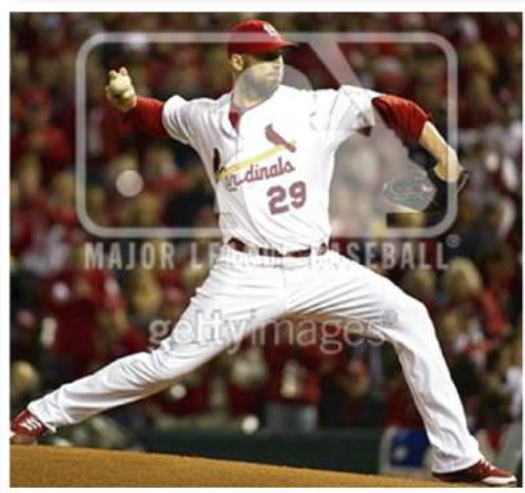


LANDING FRONT FOOT



When the front foot lands, hips begin to rotate and then the shoulders rotate – coaches should observe the back foot pivoting which indicates the rotation of the hips. The head and spine will then begin going in the direction of home plate – eyes staying level as torso begins tracking toward home.

Coaches should emphasize that young pitchers should drop their glove side elbow under their armpit as their shoulders begin to rotate. If a young pitcher has a glove that is big and heavy they will have a hard time keeping the glove stable. If the glove isn't stable balance and control will suffer.



Pitcher's front foot has landed in the direction towards home – this picture shows how the elbow joints are the mirror image of themselves and the hips are beginning to rotate before the shoulders.



Hips have rotated and now the shoulders are "kicking into action".

Notes:



RELEASING THE BASEBALL

- Ideally the best release point is in front of landing foot – if release point is not in front of landing foot and the pitcher is missing high, check the glove side – make sure the glove is stable as they begin rotating.
- Keep glove stable in front of chest as pitcher is rotating shoulders to be square to home plate.
- If the pitcher is missing left and right it is due to balance – check to see if the head is getting outside of the belly button when the pitcher is in the set up or as he/she is lifting their leg. Usually the flaw in the delivery is at the beginning of the delivery sequence in young pitchers.
- Coaches should check to see if pitchers are dragging their back foot after release – this will indicate a good stride. If there is no drag – this is a good indication the pitcher is releasing the ball early, the stride length is too short and the young pitcher may be lacking strength and flexibility.



View from the front and side as the shoulders begin to square towards home – note the good posture and position of the head as the pitcher tracks toward home plate and gets to release point. The pitcher leads with the elbow – this happens naturally and doesn't need to be taught.

Notes:

Releasing the baseball (continued)

Side view of chest tracking toward a stable glove side.



View of pitcher just before releasing the ball – note the position of the glove (stable glove) as the chest tracks toward the glove and the back foot with the shoe laces facing down as he begins to drag the toe.



Pitcher releasing the ball – notice the position of head, spine and glove (stable glove side)

Notes:



Releasing the baseball (continued)

Baseball experts would consider this a $\frac{3}{4}$ arm slot delivery. Children will determine what feels right to them for arm slot – teach posture and balance with a stable glove side. Arm slot will be determined by the athlete.



Just before release point – glove is out in front of landing knee.



After release – notice as the back foot is still in contact with ground and dragged from the rubber – think of the back foot like a rudder on a ship providing direction and balance to the body.

Notes:



FOLLOW THROUGH



Follow through should happen naturally and is something that is observed rather than taught by the coach. A good follow through is the result of good pitching mechanics - good lift with balance and good stride and momentum towards home.

Watch for young pitchers spinning off the side of the mound (RHP will spin off to the left of the mound and LHP will spin off to the right). If the spin is excessive watch the glove side to be sure that the glove is not being pulled behind their body instead of the chest tracking to the glove - glove towards target. Or watch the position of their head in their set up and delivery - where the head goes the body is sure to follow.



A good follow through is the result of good balance, posture, and momentum towards home.

Notes:



COACHING POINTS

➤➤ If you see your young pitcher struggling with control check the following:

- In the setup does the pitcher have athletic position or does the pitcher stand too tall or with his/her knees locked?
- Check the grip of the baseball...does the thumb and middle finger centre the baseball?
- When the pitcher lifts their leg, how much does their head move? If it moves too much (example the RHP has the head move to the first base side at leg lift) then have the player bend his or her knees more in the setup. If you see the head tilt early in the delivery this is a good indication balance will be compromised and control will suffer. Are they balanced when they lift the leg or does the head tilt causing their eyes not to be level?
- During the leg lift and momentum towards home do they lead with their back pocket?
- Does the pitcher have the glove side elbow mirror the throwing side elbow as they stride towards home? Or does the glove hang down below the waist – sometimes referred as a “soft glove side”. Pitchers and throwers want a firm glove side.
- Does the pitcher’s chest move toward the glove as he/she gets to release point.
- If the pitcher constantly misses high it might be due to his glove side elbow not getting underneath armpit as they rotate their shoulders.
- If the pitcher misses left and right of the plate consistently it may be the result of the head getting outside of the belly button early in the delivery.

Remember – great mechanics and perfect pitch may still result in an undesired outcome – but keep emphasizing fun and development rather than coaching on results. Failure is ok – we learn from it!



Notes:

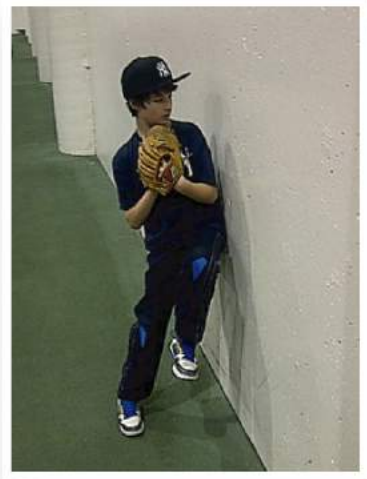




DRILLS TO EMPHASIZE GOOD PITCHING MECHANICS FOR YOUTH - *Inspired from Tom House and NPA*

Lift and thrust drill:

Have the back pocket hit the wall in the lift position emphasizing leading with the butt. With the lift leg in the air and the back pocket against the wall – have the pitcher hold this position for 5-8 seconds. Emphasize an aggressive lift and thrust toward the wall. The back heel should be slightly off the ground as they drive their hip to the wall.



Measure two of your feet away from wall – line up glove side shoulder – lead with your “butt” – don’t let shoulder touch wall.

Be sure to maintain good posture in drill.

Notes:



Drills to emphasize good pitching mechanics for youth (continued)

Knee drill:

Have the players go down on both knees and have the throwing side knee slightly behind the glove side knee. Have the players work on rotating their shoulders and trunk as they take the baseball out of their glove to achieve the glove side mirroring the throwing side. Emphasize the glove and arm side mirror each other and the head staying over the belly button. Be sure the young pitcher stabilizes the glove as they get to a release point (bring the glove side elbow underneath the arm pit). See the "3 X Drill" and have the players throw to targets on the wall.



 *Glove side knee is slightly ahead – pitcher uses arms for balance – elbows match – chest tracks to glove side.*

Knee drill can be done throwing to partner or targets on wall – be sure the pitcher keeps their posture – eyes level. 

Notes:



Drills to emphasize good pitching mechanics for youth (continued)

Rock and fire drill:

In the stride position and with the glove side mirroring the arm side have the pitcher rock back and forth from the back foot to the front foot a few times and then rotate and throw the ball to a target. This drill emphasizes tracking the chest to the glove while maintain good balance and not letting the head get outside of the belly button. Emphasize the glove side and don't let the glove get outside of their body or behind their body as they rotate. Also the pitcher should drag the back foot (ideal foot drag is 2 feet – but it depends on the strength of the pitcher).



▲ Pitcher should have the elbows match – rock back and forth – rotate hips and release ball to the target while maintaining good balance and posture.

3 “X” drill:

Place 3 “x” on the wall with tape. Have your young pitchers in the stretch position hit each “X” with a baseball. Use the rock and fire drill and the knee drill as variation before using the stretch position.

▶ Throw to a partner or target on the wall – have the young pitcher “torque” the shoulders when rocking back and forth.





Drills to emphasize good pitching mechanics for youth (continued)

Other drills:

- **Hit the hat drill**
- **Japanese Pitching Drill or 18 Strikes** - Have your players form two lines. Each player should have a baseball in their glove. The first person in line should be in a good set up position in the stretch ready to deliver the baseball to a coach in a catcher's position (need a catcher for each line). When the coach says "go" the first person in each line delivers a pitch to the coach (catcher). Once they deliver the pitch they go to the back of the line. The coach will acknowledge whether it was a strike or ball – the first team to get to 18 wins.....
- **Run and Gun** – place a cone 4-5 feet from a chain link fence, netting or backstop, have your pitchers start 70-80 feet away – have them run and then throw to hit the pylon. Set it up so there are 3-4 other groups. Have the groups compete against each other – first team to hit the pylon. This drill emphasizes training arm speed. This is an optimal time to train for speed with this age.



Notes:

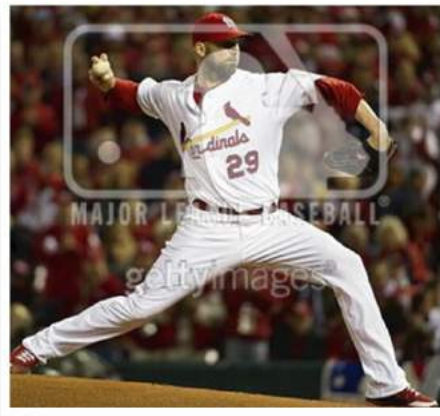


COMPARE THE YOUTH PITCHER AND THE PROFESSIONAL:

1

Observing the picture above – compare this picture with a similar picture of professional pitcher (see picture of the pitcher at landing)...

List what you see is different. What drill would you use to correct the flaw?



Notes:

2

Compare the youth pitcher with the professional pitcher.

What do you observe? What drill or drills would you use to assist the youth pitcher?



Notes:



Compare the youth pitcher and the professional (continued)

3

Does the glove arm elbow match the throwing side elbow? Where should the glove be?

Notes:



4

Where should the glove be right before release point? Look back and compare with professional pitchers.

Notes:



5

Compare release point of this youth pitcher with a professional pitcher.

Notes:



Compare the youth pitcher and the professional (continued)

6

The mechanics of throwing in other sports like football are the same. List the similarities you see.



Notes:
