

## **Pitching Basics**

The first thing to understand about pitching is that it takes controlled repetition to properly learn the basic motion. Your daughter should want to practice on a frequent basis. I encourage my clients to practice at least four times per week when starting out. The duration for each practice can vary. Practice as long as your daughter is having fun and is engaged. Going through the motions does not improve technique. Twenty minutes of engaged practice can go a lot further than an hour of unengaged repetition.

Practice can be broken into parts as well. Maybe your daughter benefits from doing 5 minutes of snap work and taking a break before starting in on other drill work or full pitching. There are several drills that can be modified to be done indoors in case of darkness or inclement weather. Be creative and remember that young kids do not typically have a long attention span, even for activities they enjoy. It becomes the job of the parent and/or coach to keep workouts varied and interesting. If your daughter is having fun practicing, then “becoming a pitcher” is serving its ultimate purpose already.

Let's start at square one!

First, make sure the equipment you are utilizing is correct for your daughter. 10 and under players use an 11” ball. All other levels use a 12” ball. Fastpitch uses a yellow, leather ball with raised seams and compression ratings of 375 lbs.

Second, let's set up the pitching distance. The measured distance is the front of the rubber to the back tip of the plate. 10U players throw from 35 ft. 12U players throw from 40 ft. All other levels (for the most part) throw from 43 ft. These distances are regulation, but for our purposes at this point of development, they are merely guidelines. At the beginning, work at closer distances while your daughter learns the basics. Ensure that she is finding this experience to be encouraging.

It's important to understand the whole motion but in manageable, teachable parts. Here, I have broken down the motion into 3 pieces: pre-motion, k-position and flip/follow through. I first provide an introduction to the pitching motion, called the presentation. Before we get to that though, let's talk about power line, the concept upon which the whole motion is built. We see the power line in just about every aspect of the game. Here's how it contributes to pitching.

### **Power line**

Arguably the MOST important part of pitching!! The power line is a simple concept. Draw or just imagine a straight line beginning at the pitcher and ending at the target (which is directly over the middle of the plate, just to keep things simple). We are going to build our motion on this power line. The idea is that if we keep the ball on our power line during the motion, we increase our chances that it follows that same line to the target, resulting in more strikes and overall better accuracy. There is also a speed component to sticking to the power line, but we'll get into that later.

### **Presentation**

While proper presentation is not part of pitching mechanics, it helps to learn how to present and get set on the mound. We can ensure that we are throwing legally and promote a rhythm right from the beginning. Start a couple feet behind the pitching rubber, facing home plate, with your arms separated and hanging at your sides. The ball can be either in your hand or your glove, but the hands must be separated. Approach the rubber by placing your throwing foot halfway over the front side of the rubber. If you are right handed, your right foot should be somewhere between the middle of the rubber and the right side. If you are left handed, your left foot should be somewhere between the middle of the

rubber and the left side. Your glove foot (or stride foot) should be barely touching the back side of the rubber and about shoulder distanced from your throwing foot. This should be a very balanced stance. Any signs from the catcher or coach need to be taken from this position before the hands join. Once any signs are received, bring your hands together and pause. This is a good time to take a moment to focus, relax or visualize the ball hitting the target.

### **Premotion**

The premotion is any motion that happens prior to the arm rotation. At the beginning stages of development, it is more important to keep the premotion small, so we can ensure proper balance and weight transfer. I recommend starting with the hands together in front of the lower abdominal area, with the elbows slightly bent. From there, push both arms down as you lean forward and bend into the throwing knee. The hands can separate as they become straight and both arms should reach forward to the target.

You can also choose to use a backswing. If so, start with your hands together, resting in front of your throwing leg. Slowly separate the hands and bring your throwing arm back toward second base (staying on the power line). At this stage of development, I recommend a small backswing (no more than 45 degrees up the backward rotation). As your arm swings forward past your hip, both arms should be reaching forward to the target together.

The stride leg (left leg for righties; right leg for lefties) should then move up and forward along the power line as the throwing foot pivots the body into a 90 degree (open position) turn. At this time, both arms are continuing up the rotation. Once the throwing hand reaches the top of the arm circle, the palm should open up to second base. The glove arm should start back down the rotation on the front side.

### **K-Position**

The throwing arm is extended to the top of the arm circle, glove arm pointed toward the target and body in an open position. The stride foot lands at a slight angle (between 45-90 degrees to the plate is great for now) near the power line. The body weight should be slightly over the back foot at this point of the motion. As the arm is making it's way down the arm circle, ensure that the ball is still traveling on the power line and the arm is loose and relaxed as it prepares to release the ball. As the arm approaches the release, the body weight should be shifting forward, but do not bend at the waist. Keep the hips in the open position (at least halfway) until the ball is released.

### **Flip/Follow through**

The release of the ball is often referred to as the wrist snap. The wrist should be cocked backward, with the palm facing down. As the wrist begins to snap the ball forward to the catcher, keep the fingertips behind the ball and flick forward. Don't forget that the fingertips are just as important as the wrist when releasing the ball. At this point, the arm should continue its motion forward and up the rotation. Do not tighten to stop any motion. The throwing leg should drag forward toward the stride leg and the hips should close to bring the body square to the target. For beginners, I recommend trying to follow through so that both feet are on opposite sides of the power line and the body is balanced, ready to field a ball.

Before you start practicing, here are some things to consider. Good mechanics equal good pitching.

1. Remember to start slow. Do each piece of the motion by itself before trying to put it all together. Don't even throw a ball to start. It may help to just do the motion in front of a mirror

several times. Think of the pitching motion like a series of new dance steps. Do them slow first to make sure you have them down before trying to put the whole routine together.

2. From good mechanics come strikes. Don't worry about *trying* to throw strikes. Work instead on having good form. Repetition work with good form will provide you with great accuracy.
3. Do NOT try to throw hard. Speed is the last thing we should be concerned with at the beginning. Trying to throw with speed at this point will hinder your ability to throw with proper form.

Most importantly, have fun! The more you enjoy practicing, the more you will get out of your practices. Pitching, at times, can get frustrating. Exercise patience and remember that it takes years of consistent practice to master this skill set.

## **Beginning Pitching Progression**

### **Beginning Pitching Progression**- Part 1 of 2

Please take the time to read through [Pitching Basics](#) before reading this article on *Beginning Pitching Progression*.

In this progression, we will start with the grip/snap and work through a series of drills to put the motion together a piece at a time. This progression can be used as all or the majority of your practices at the beginning of pitching development. Consider using all or some of these drills as your pre-pitching warm up to ensure you are building correct form and properly warming up your arm and body. These drills are designed to be done slowly and with a controlled arm and body motion.

### **Grip**

There are several different types of grips for several different types of pitches. We're going to first focus on the fastball, using a \*4-seam rotation grip. Locate the "C" on the ball (made with the seams). Place 3 fingers (4 fingers if hands are small) across the "C" on the ball. The fingertips should be just slightly over the seams at the top of the "C". Place the thumb in line with either the pointer or middle finger and on the seam at the bottom of the "C" or below it (depending on the size of the hand). The ball should be sitting in the fingers and NOT in the palm of the hand. The grip should be relaxed. Treat the ball like a raw egg. Don't squeeze!

\*4-seam rotation grip—When the ball is released with this type of grip, it yields a ball rotation that includes all 4 seams per rotation to the plate.

### **Snap**

Start about 3-5 feet away from your target. Stand with the body at a 90-degree angle (open position) to the target. (If right handed, the body should be facing the third base side of the field.) Bring the toes close to the power line. The front toe can be angled anywhere between 45-90 degrees from the target. Keep knees soft, but be sure to stand up straight. Allow the throwing arm to hang long and loose just in front of the rear leg. With the ball in the throwing hand and with proper grip, cock the wrist backward toward second base. The palm should be facing the ground and the forearm facing the target. Try to completely isolate the arm motion and use just the wrist and fingertips to snap the ball forward to the target. Be sure to stay relaxed with the wrist and fingers. The wrist should begin snapping forward while the fingers flick the ball to the target, and the fingertips should lose contact with the ball last. The

objective is to deliver the ball with as much 4-seam rotation as possible while on the power line to the target.

## **Beginning Pitching Progression**

### **Beginning Pitching Progression**- Part 2 of 1

Please take the time to read through [Pitching Basics](#) and [Beginning Pitching Progression-Part 1](#) before reading this article.

In part 2 of this progression, we will start with the K-Position and rotation drills, working through a series of drills to put the motion together a piece at a time. This progression can be used as all or the majority of your practices at the beginning of pitching development. Consider using all or some of these drills as your pre-pitching warm up to ensure you are building correct form and properly warming up your arm and body. These drills are designed to be done slowly and with a controlled arm and body motion.

### **Kneeling K-Position**

Start about 10-15 feet away from your target. With the body in an open position, kneel down on the throwing knee. The stride leg (glove leg) should be extended toward to the target with the stride foot on the ground. The stride knee should be strong and straight but not locked. Take a moment to make sure your body is aligned along the power line. The toe of the stride foot should be angled anywhere between 45-90 degrees to the target. Extend your glove arm to point at your target and bring your throwing arm directly up to the top of the arm rotation. Be sure that your arm is on the power line and not behind your body. Open the palm of the throwing hand toward second base and allow the wrist to cock back. (Please note that the hand does not need to be completely open to second base.) Bring the arm down the rotation on the power line, snap at the back leg, and bring the arm forward to the target. Allow the arm to finish naturally. Some pitchers try to stop the arm motion prematurely. If you see this happening, encourage the pitcher to reach the arm forward to the target (shake hands with the target) and then bend the throwing elbow and allow the throwing hand to come all the way up to touch the top of their throwing shoulder.

### **Kneeling Full-Rotation**

Start in the same position as Kneeling K-Position. Bring both arms forward, outstretched at shoulder level and pointed toward the target. This brings the shoulders squared to the target (closed), while the lower half of the body is in an open position. It may feel awkward at first. Both palms should be facing down. Begin the rotation by bringing both arms up the circle. Allow the shoulders to turn open as you approach the top of the arm circle. Now, you are in Kneeling K-Position, and you know what to do from here!

### **Static Full-Rotation**

This position is exactly the same as Kneeling Full-Rotation, except we are going to do it from a standing position. Start about 15-20 feet away from your target. With the body in open position, align both toes near the power line. Distribute your body weight with about 60% weight on the throwing leg. Your throwing knee should be slightly bent. The stride knee should be strong and straight but not locked. Reach both arms toward the target at shoulder level. Your upper body should be squared to your target (closed) and your lower body is open, just like the Kneeling Full Rotation drill. Keep the bottom half of the body as isolated as possible while the upper body rotates open with the arm circle. For now, try to keep the weight

evenly distributed between both legs or with the weight slightly more on the rear leg throughout the drill. DO NOT lose balance and DO NOT move the feet.

### **Full-Rotation with Follow Through**

Repeat the Static Full-Rotation drill (above). As the ball is released, allow the weight to transfer from the back leg to the front leg, without bending the front knee. Make sure the body stays straight and tall. Do not bend at the waist. After the ball is released, bring the throwing foot (pivot foot) forward by dragging the inside of the toe in a sweeping motion to the front foot. Analyze your drag mark. It should look somewhat like a smile or a banana. Turn the hips and bring the pivot foot all the way to an even position with the stride foot, allowing the hips to turn completely closed and the body to be squared to the plate with both toes facing forward.

Once you've successfully worked through all of these drills, begin work on the presentation and premotion portions of the pitch (Please refer to *Pitching Basics*). Once all three stages of the motion (Premotion, K-position and Flip/Follow Through) are independently successful, start putting the full pitch together. As you advance through the basics of the motion, refer back to these drills for any areas that are causing difficulty. It may be that you want to spend extra time in certain drills to automate specific portions of the motion. Even after mastering basic pitching form, many pitchers continue to use all or some of these drills in their warm up routines or to break down particular portions of the motion that are causing trouble. Remember to stay relaxed and go slow to start. Your speed will increase naturally as your body becomes more comfortable with the motion.