

Softball Pitching Mechanics

When teaching *softball pitching mechanics*, the best way to avoid injury, develop consistency, and see results is through repetition and attention to detail.

Even a slight change in style can dramatically affect the accuracy of the pitch, so pitchers and coaches should watch for any changes due to fatigue, injury, compensation, or desire for better results.

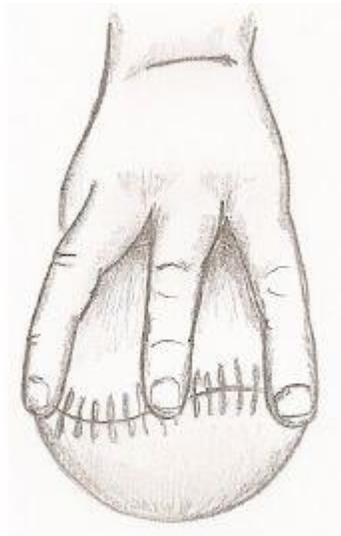
While it is good to experiment and discover the best pitching style for each player, this should be done under your adult supervision to ensure safety and good habits.

Below, I've broken the softball pitching motion down into 4 key steps. Please have a look and let me know what you think by leaving a comment.

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Grip

As with most parts of pitching, there is no right or wrong way to hold the ball. However, most pitchers find control and comfort with a grip that allows the ball to rotate from top to bottom. The best way to get this movement is to turn the softball so that the seam makes a "U" to the side,



instead of up and down.

Pitchers should grip the ball so that their fingers rest on the seam when it is on its side. The grip should be tight and steady but not so intense that it causes strain to the forearm or wrist. The wrist

should always be kept in line with the arm to avoid any potential injuries, not flexed up or down or twisted to the side.

Ball and Glove Together

Most softball associations and leagues require pitchers to bring the ball and glove together for at least one second before the pitch. While this will not help your pitchers develop good technique, it does create a rhythm, which is equally as important in developing solid pitches.

Players can bring the ball and glove together at any point, but a natural meeting point is in front of the body near the waist. This allows the pitching arm to stay in a natural location prior to the start of the pitch and conserves energy before the wind-up.

Parts of the Swing—Arm Movements

The basic softball swing has several independent components that come together to make up the swing. By identifying each part of the swing and its importance, you can better prepare your team to understand their swing, make necessary adjustments, and improve the quality of their pitches.

The following movements make up a swing:

- Back swing
- Arm rotation
- Final down swing
- Release
- Follow-through

Back Swing—The height and speed of the back swing are not important and should not be focused on. The back swing is simply the beginning of the swing. Players should practice with different back swings until they find what is comfortable; for many, this means a back swing that is about parallel with the ground. For others, it is much less.



Arm Rotation—The arm rotation is the most important part of the swing because it determines the power of the pitch. After the back swing, the arm and the body will naturally move forward. Ensure that players make their arm rotation equally fast from beginning to end. By maintaining power, pitchers ensure that they deliver a pitch with maximum speed.

When bringing the arm around, players should keep the arm straight and in line but not “locked out,” where their elbow is locked and stiff. This poses the risk for injury and reduces the arm’s range of motion.

Final Down Swing—This motion is what finishes the arm rotation and precedes the release. It is crucial that the final down swing is tight, fast, and consistent, because that determines how successful the release will be.

Release—The release is the most difficult part of the entire swing, because even minor variations can result in huge changes in ball placement. As the arm comes through the final down swing, pitchers should keep their wrists back so they get a full snap as they release the ball.

The hand should stay turned up through the release. This means that just before letting go of the ball, if the pitcher looked down, she should be looking at her palm, not the back of her hand.

One of the usually-overlooked but rather important points of the release is the body position. Pitchers should keep themselves tall, not allowing themselves to fold at the waist or lean to one side. Their pitching arm should be outstretched, putting them in position for a good follow-through and maximizing the power they get from that arm.

During the entire pitch, but especially at the release, pitchers should keep their body still, including the head. By not moving the head, players avoid injury and ensure that they release the ball when and where they intend to.

The pitch should be released when the arm is at waist height or slightly higher. This is the optimal strike zone and will most consistently provide good, fair pitches.

Follow-Through—After the pitch is released, it is essential that pitchers execute a good follow-through. The technique and form of the follow-through is not as important as its consistency. Pitchers must always allow their arms to continue the movement to avoid injury.

Many players find that their follow-through extends to near shoulder height and that their arm bends at the elbow. This is a natural, comfortable position for many pitchers, but it should not be seen as the only or the best follow-through method.

Parts of the Swing—Footwork

Though the arms may seem difficult to master, the real work and intricacy in pitching comes from the body and leg movements. Pitchers go through three stages when they are pitching: closed, open, and closed again.

When starting the pitch, pitchers are directly facing the catcher and are considered to be “closed.” As they step forward and begin the arm rotation, the body opens up so that the pitcher is no longer facing the catcher; her side is facing the catcher.

As the ball comes through the final down swing and into the release, the body closes back up most of the way and allows the pitcher to place the ball directly at the catcher.

This pattern is often difficult to pair with the arm rotation because it requires muscle control and significant focus. Coaches should work with players extensively to help them develop a habit and a rhythm that allows them to make simultaneous arm and leg movements leading to a successful pitch.

The following movements make up the foot pattern for a pitch:

- Stepping Stride
- Leaping Stride
- Drag

The stride starts with the player on the mound. According to most associations and leagues, at least one foot has to start touching the pitching rubber. This is to ensure that everyone starts at the same place on the mound and that there is no room for confusion or cheating.

The stride itself refers to the step that pitchers take with their glove foot. As players bring the ball up and back during the arm rotation, the opposite leg, or the leg on the same side as the glove hand, takes a giant step forward. This is called the stride.

Strides can be different lengths, but a longer stride usually equates to a better pitch, as long as the pitcher can control both the arms and legs during the stride. This is because the stride gives momentum to the ball by putting the weight of the entire body behind it, instead of just the arm. It also puts the pitcher closer to the plate, increasing the speed of the ball when it gets to the batter and making it harder to hit.

A good rule of thumb for stride length is to encourage players to make their strides about the same length as their height. If they can make their strides longer, that is great, but they should at least aim to stride their body length.

As pitchers become more comfortable with the mechanics of the swing and the components that make up the big picture, encourage them to extend their stride without changing any other process. This leads to big advantages when pitchers know how to stride properly for their height and maximize the power they can put behind the ball.

Stepping Stride—There are two methods for the stride—stepping and leaping. The stepping stride is a less-aggressive, easier style that is good for beginning pitchers and those who want to focus on technique and the basics. The stepping stride simply involves pitchers stepping forward as far as they can go as they go through the arm rotation. It means that their step will be shorter than a leaping stride, but more controlled and possibly more successful for that reason.

The stepping stride begins with the arm movement and follows with the step. As the arm comes through the final down swing, the step begins. The key point of the stepping stride is the push off the pitching rubber. It provides the necessary resistance and momentum for the release of the ball.

Leaping Stride—The leaping stride is illegal under most association and league rules, because it involves players having both feet off the ground at once. To avoid doing an actual leap, pitchers often involve the drag, which will be discussed later. A leaping stride allows pitchers to get better range of motion and a longer, more aggressive stride.

Leaping strides also help with momentum and power. This style of stride is considered a more advanced move and should be treated as such, with progression between the stepping stride and the leaping stride. It is more difficult because it requires more thought, more muscle control, and more strength than the stepping stride.

As players land on the leaping foot, they should push backwards to stop their momentum from carrying them forward and create the necessary resistance for the release. This is different from the stepping stride, where the resistance comes from pushing off the rubber, not absorbing the leap and pushing against the ground.

Drag—The drag is important with leaping strides, because it makes them legal in most standard rulebooks. The concept is this: in order to keep one foot on the ground at all times, and therefore make the leaping stride legal, the pitcher drags the back foot, or the pitching foot, on the ground while the opposite foot, the glove foot, leaps forward to help the pitcher gain the necessary momentum and stretch for a good pitch.

The drag takes practice and precision, because it is very hard to ensure that the foot stays on the ground. If a player does not have enough momentum during the leap, the dragging foot will jam into the ground and actually slow the pitcher down instead of helping keep them legal. If the pitcher has too much momentum, they run the risk of having the dragging foot come off the ground as well, making the pitch illegal and risking disqualification.

To properly drag, pitchers should turn their foot to the side and point it, like a dancer. Dragging the inside of the foot, on the “big toe” side, allows for maximum extension on the leap as well as comfort for the pitcher, so it is recommended.

Dragging should only occur until the leaping foot lands on the ground again, which means that the drag will be about one foot long or shorter. Any more drag and your pitchers will decrease their balance and speed. The drag should begin as soon as the dragging foot leaves the pitching rubber to ensure that at no time is the pitcher completely airborne.

Next step: If you’d like to learn more tips and techniques for coaching your softball team, check out [this free softball drill video](#).