

Drills: Pitcher's Toolbox

Goal:

To improve each day at basic pitching techniques

Description:

Pitchers pair up, and one pitches while the other catches. The player who acts as the catcher assumes a catcher's stance. They switch positions after each stage of drills. Players move through the stages each day of practice, completing each stage every two days. As the season progresses, add or substitute drills as required.

- Stage 1:** Player A grips a shred of a small towel between the thumb and middle finger like a ball so that about 12 inches dangles in front of his hand. From a set position, player A practices his delivery by moving the arm through its full range of motion and snapping the towel out in front at the point where he would normally release the ball. Player B watches and notes where the stride foot lands during this motion. After several deliveries, player B assumes a position in a direct line and five steps in front of player A, faces player A, drops to one knee and holds his glove at eye level. Player A then goes through his pitching motion and tries to snap the towel on the outstretched glove. He repeats the action 10 times with emphasis on keeping the front shoulder closed as long as possible.
- Stage 2:** Players A and B face each other from 30 feet apart. Player A kneels with the knees shoulder-width apart on the ground and the hands together in his glove in front of his chest. Player A leans forward almost to the point of falling and then tightens his abdominal muscles to maintain that posture. From this position, player A rotates his shoulders, moves his arm in the correct arm path and throws to player B, throwing fastballs, curveballs and changeups (for added difficulty, place a three-pound weight in the glove to emphasize keeping the glove in front). Player A repeats the action 10 times with emphasis on keeping the glove arm in front of the chest pointed at the partner. On the follow-through, the chest should extend toward the glove arm.
- Stage 3:** Players A and B position themselves as they do in stage 2, only player A now stands with the feet shoulder-width apart and holds the hands and ball together in front of his chest. From this position, player A rotates his hips and shoulders, separates his hands, and goes through the proper throwing motion to player B, alternating fastballs, curveballs and changeups. He repeats the action 10 times with emphasis on keeping his eyes on the target and using fast hand action.
- Stage 4:** Players A and B are 45 feet apart. Player A assumes a balance position, holds that position for three counts, lifts his stride knee slightly, completes his motion and throws to player B, alternating fastballs, curveballs and changeups. He repeats the action 10 times with emphasis on starting forward when the knee reaches its high point, using proper arm action, exploding the hips and following through.





- Stage 5:** Players A and B are 60 feet apart with a home plate or other visible object 45 feet from player A and in line with player B. Player A throws to that target and bounces the ball to his partner. He repeats the action 10 times.
- Stage 6:** Players A and B are 60 to 75 feet apart. Player A is in the stretch position with feet shoulder-width apart and holds the ball and his glove in front of his body. From this position, player A begins rocking back and forth, shifting his weight from the big toe of his front foot to the big toe of his rear foot, elevating his hips as he rocks and bringing one knee toward the other. The shifting back and forth of weight is much like a batter's preswing preparation for a pitch. After player A rocks four or five times, player B calls "Now!" and player A plants his stride foot, gets his arm quickly up into throwing position and throws to player B. He repeats the action 10 times with emphasis on quick, explosive throws.
- Stage 7:** Player A is 45 feet from a wall. Player B stands five feet to glove side of and slightly behind player A. Player A moves through the complete pitching motion and throws the ball to the wall. Player B fields the ball and returns it to player A for the next repetition, alternating fastballs, curveballs and changeups. He repeats the action 10 times with emphasis on technique and concentrating on different parts of the motion each day (explosive hips, follow-through and so on). A variation requires players to throw plastic hockey pucks instead of balls with emphasis on proper rotation of the puck.
- Stage 8:** Two baseballs are taped together firmly with trainer's tape, one on top of the other. Players A and B are 30 feet apart. Player A moves through both the windup and stretch and then throws the taped balls to player B as if he is throwing a curveball. He should throw the ball end over end in a 12 o'clock–6 o'clock fashion. He repeats the action 10 times with emphasis on correct rotation and keeping the hand above the ball. A variation requires players to hold the balls as a circle change (balls will rotate like a helicopter blade) and throw to the partner with emphasis on proper release of the ball and pronation of the hand.

Variation:

To turn this daily drill set into a gamelike situation called *Dueling Pitchers*, pitchers perform all phases of the toolbox but challenge each other to perform better in each phase. For example, in stage 1, players receive points each time they successfully swat the partner's glove with the towel. In stage 2, they receive points for each ball they successfully throw in the strike zone. Players earn 1 point for each successful attempt at each stage. The pitcher accumulating the most points over the course of the day wins.

