



ULTIMATE SOFTBALL

PITCHING DRILLS





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INTRODUCTION

As a sport, softball's popularity continues to grow both nationally and internationally. The positive of this is that young girls have plenty of softball role models to look up to, but the negative is that they might be trying too hard to emulate other pitchers.

Every girl's body type is a little different, and even when executing the same mechanics will have different throwing motions. So instead of worrying about how someone else throws, we want our pitchers to focus all their energy on being fundamentally sound.

Yes, there are pitchers who are such gifted athletes, that they may have broken fundamentals and somehow still be successful and injury free at a high level of the sport – but this is not who we should be basing our form on.

The goal is to create consistent fundamentals, with the same speed and body motion, delivering the ball to the plate with as much efficiency and effectiveness as possible. To start out, the pitcher should not be focusing on speed or control, just fundamentals.

Once she is able to throw the ball to the plate with good, hard, consistent speed and fundamentals, control is just a matter of basic adjustments.

In this guide we'll begin with a look at the basic fastball fundamentals, and then delve into all the different drills you as a coach can use to both reinforce the correct fundamentals and build strength and arm speed, as well as drills that you can use to identify and correct common fundamental errors.

Quick Note: If you haven't had a chance yet, you can still upgrade your order to include the Ultimate Softball Pitching Drills online video clinic by going here now:

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You'll get step by step video demonstrations for all the mechanical drills included in this report, plus dozens of useful coaching tips to accelerate your results!

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SOFTBALL PITCHING MECHANICS

While it's true that different types of pitches will have slightly different finish to them – whether it's the stride length, snap of the wrist, or hip rotation – the beginning should always be the same.

From the start of the pitch to the 'X' position we want our pitches to look almost identical, hiding the pitch until we have to tip our hand.

It's important to emphasize how critical it is to stay nice and loose throughout the entire pitching motion. When a pitcher tightens up, the stiffness will reduce the whip created in the arm circle, resulting in a slower pitch. Put simply, the better the whip, the faster the ball.

We'll begin with a discussion of the power line - an essential element for teaching proper mechanics. Next, we'll break down the pitching motion into 4 key phases: Grip, Stance and Presentation, Arm Circle and Stride, and Release and Follow Through.

POWER LINE

Before beginning any pitching workout, take a moment to draw a "power line" onto your practice area. This is simply a line directly from the middle of the pitcher's rubber down to the middle of the plate.

A pitcher who steps straight ahead and lands with her stride foot on the line (preferably at a 30 to 45 degree angle) will be able to generate maximum power in that pitch. Pitchers who use the power line will also be better balanced, and have better command of their pitch locations.

The power line can also act as your pitcher's compass, allowing her to adjust her aim to the east or west simply by stepping to the left or right of the power line as she executes the pitch.



PHASE 1: GRIP

The pitcher can choose one of two possible fastball grips - either the "C" grip (or 4-seam grip) or the "Horseshoe" grip (or 2-seam grip).

The "C" grip is usually recommended for new pitchers because it has no tailing action. The vertical rotation of all four seams forces the ball to hold a straight line from the pitcher's hand to the catcher's mitt.

A two seam fastball will have the long seams of the ball rotating down, causing the ball to break slightly back toward the pitcher's throwing arm.

No matter what grip your pitcher chooses (and it's a good idea to allow her to experiment with both), make sure she has a comfortable grip on the ball, with the pads of the fingers and thumb resting on the seams.



Fastball - C-Grip



Fastball - Horseshoe Grip

PHASE 2: STANCE AND PRESENTATION



STANCE

Most softball leagues will require a pitcher to approach the rubber from behind, so it's a good idea to practice this (especially with younger pitchers).

Step onto the rubber from behind, with the hands apart, and the ball in your bare hand. This is called the "presentation" - showing the batter that you have the ball and are getting ready to pitch.

The stance itself should be comfortable and relaxed. The pitcher's hips should be closed (parallel to the catcher). Her shoulders should be back and feet at around shoulder width apart.

The feet must be placed where the league or association requires them to be. Typically, the push-off (or throwing side) foot must be at the front of the pitching rubber, with at least half of it on the surface of the rubber.

The stride (or glove side) foot will usually be behind the rubber or touching the back edge of the rubber.

PHASE 3: ARM CIRCLE AND STRIDE



BACK SWING

After the presentation, the pitcher will bring the ball and glove together in front of the waist, and pause for at least one second (per the rules of your league or association).

The arm circle begins with a back-swing of the pitching arm. Take the ball out of the glove and swing it back to approximately 9 o'clock, so the pitching arm is level with the ground.

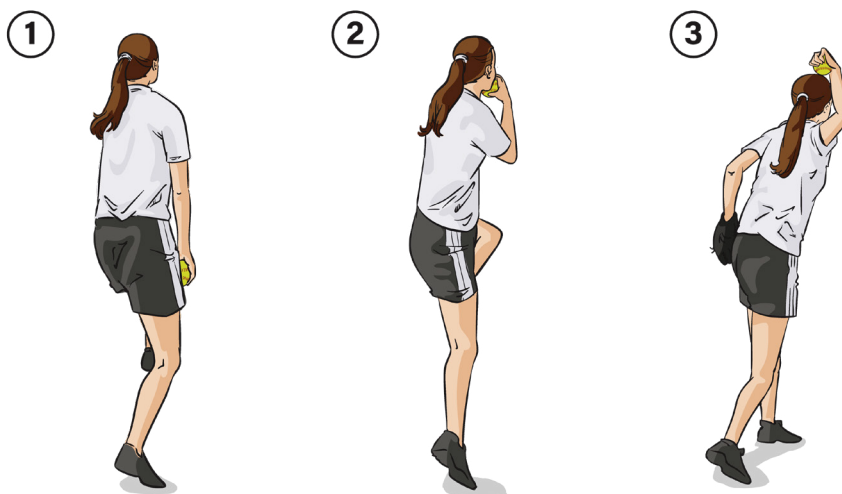
The speed of the back-swing is up to the pitcher - it's the speed of the arm circle that counts, so the back-swing can be slower if the pitcher prefers.

As the pitching arm begins to move forward again, she will raise her stride leg and begin to drive forward off the rubber, using her push-off foot. As she extends her stride toward the plate, the pitching arm continues forward and completes a full windmill circle, staying relaxed and straight, but not stiff. The arm speed should be consistent and fast the whole way around.

The timing of the stride will vary from pitcher to pitcher and from pitch to pitch, but generally the stride leg should be landing just after the pitching arm has come up past the head.

It can be helpful to imagine the arm circle as a clock. When the glove and pitching hands separate, the glove should be at around 3 o'clock, and when the stride leg lands, the pitching arm should be somewhere between 10 and 12 o'clock.

This is to ensure that the back side of the body has ample time to deliver momentum and power to the pitch before it's released.



ARM CIRCLE AND STRIDE

Also, much like how the dial stays in the middle of the clock as the hands go around in a circle, the head on our pitcher must stay balanced, centered firmly between her two feet.

The body follows the lead of the head, and if the head is off-balance, it will throw off the entire pitching motion.

As the pitcher drives off the rubber, pushing the stride leg out in front, the heel of her push-off foot should come up off the ground, leaving her toe in the dirt.

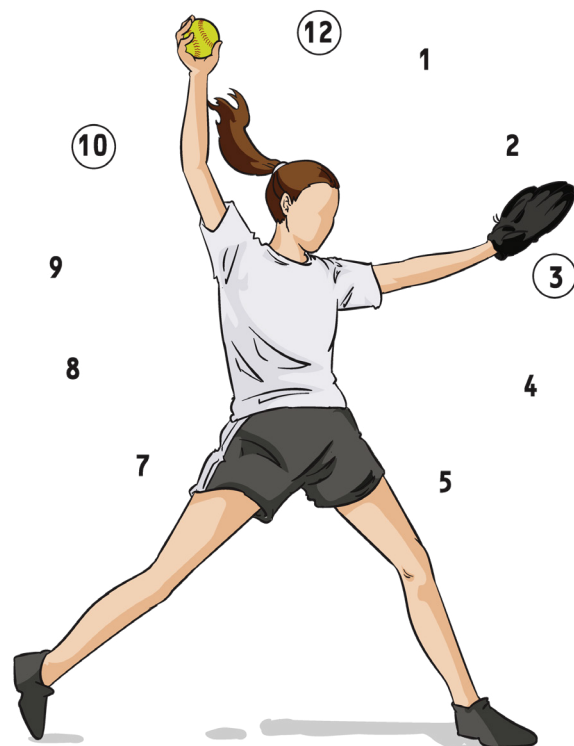
This is how you know the pitcher is pushing off with all of her power, directing all of her energy down the power line and towards home plate.

When the stride foot lands, it should be flat on the power line, at a 45 degree angle, with the knee flexed, but still firm. With the stride foot down, the pitching arm and drive leg will begin to lead the rest of the back side of the body in a continuous motion down the power line.

The elbow will lead the whip of the throwing arm as it comes down through the circle, and the knee will lead the drive of the back leg as it moves forward and into the drag.

A common and costly mistake at this point in the pitch is for pitchers to ignore the back leg movement.

Doing so will not only decrease the efficiency of motion that would be gained by synchronizing the bottom and top halves of the body, but will also greatly increase the chance of injury due to the extra stress placed on the pitcher from throwing "all arm."



ARM CIRCLE CLOCK

PHASE 4: RELEASE AND FOLLOW THROUGH

The final phase of the pitch is the release and follow through. As the arm comes down past the hip, keep the wrist back then allow it to whip forward at the precise instant the ball is released.

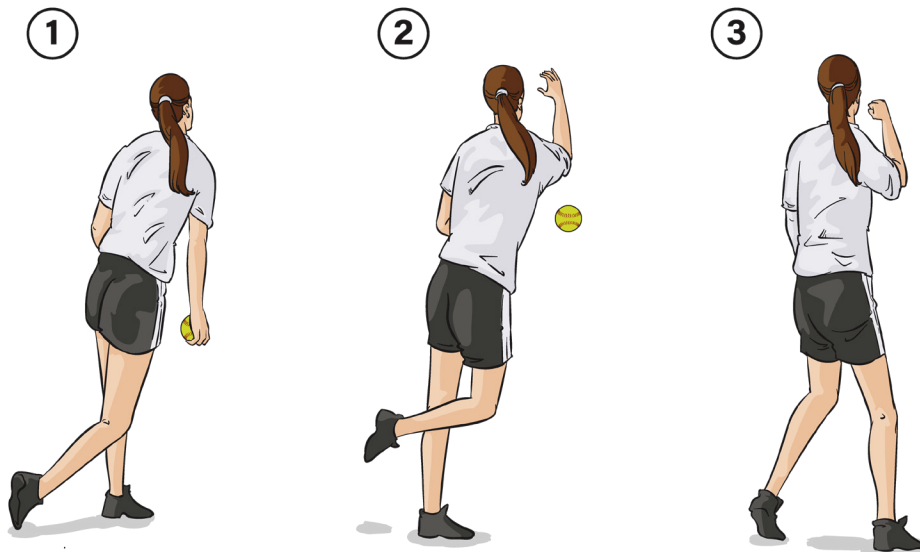
Do not bend at the waist or lead with the head. The pitcher should stay tall and upright with her shoulders back and level - no dipping or leaning toward the throwing arm side.

On the follow through, allow the arm to stay loose at the joint, and let the arm finish in a natural way.

Some pitchers prefer to let the hand turn over in front of the body and dangle loosely at the wrist. While others prefer to finish with the arm bent upward in an L-shape, the elbow in front of the body and the hand pointing straight up.

It's important to remember however that even if your pitcher leans toward the mechanical side of things, it's important that the arm stay loose at the joints, as staying tight in the elbow through the snap and release is not only unnecessary but could lead to elbow soreness or even injury.

Regardless of the type of follow through, the pitcher should be balanced, in full control of her body and ready to make a play fielding the ball if necessary.



RELEASE AND FOLLOW THROUGH

MECHANICAL DRILLS

In this section, we'll go through a simple drill progression designed to teach and reinforce the proper mechanics. With each drill, we will isolate a specific phase of the pitching motion so that coaches can examine the pitcher's mechanics, then make suggestions to refine them.

Note: For all of the following drills your girls will need softballs, their mitt, and ideally a fully geared catcher. They should also draw a power line from the mound to the plate. For the drills that do require more materials we will specifically list the necessary items.

SUGGESTED TRAINING AID - THE WEIGHTED BALL

One of the things you'll see mentioned quite a bit throughout this guide is the weighted ball, which is an incredible tool for pitchers both young and experienced.

Not only does it improve strength through the added resistance of a heavier load, but also because of the way they are designed, they give us a chance to observe the rotation of the ball more easily, which in turn allows us to identify mistakes and make the necessary.

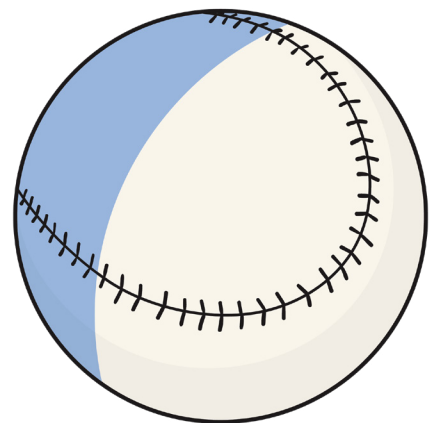
The weighted ball is generally one half white and one half blue, and our pitchers would grip it so that their middle finger would run along that middle line.

An experienced pitcher, batter, or coach may be able to read rotations on a normal softball, but the two solid colors make it very easy to figure out what kind of spin were dealing with.

If it isn't the correct spin, it makes diagnosing flaws in our pitchers mechanics much easier, which will allow the pitcher to learn how to make the proper corrections very quickly.

Keep in mind that the weighted ball can be tough on the joints, especially for younger pitchers. Refrain from using it for pitchers 12 years old or younger, and for the pitchers 13 and up, we limit them to working from the 'X' position instead of going through the full arm circle.

We use them at the beginning of a workout, with our aim being to get them warmed up and working on their wrist snap, form and finger strength. As a general rule we like to throw about 25 pitches per drill, but when working with the weighted ball, we do 15 and limit it to just our first three drills.



weighted softball

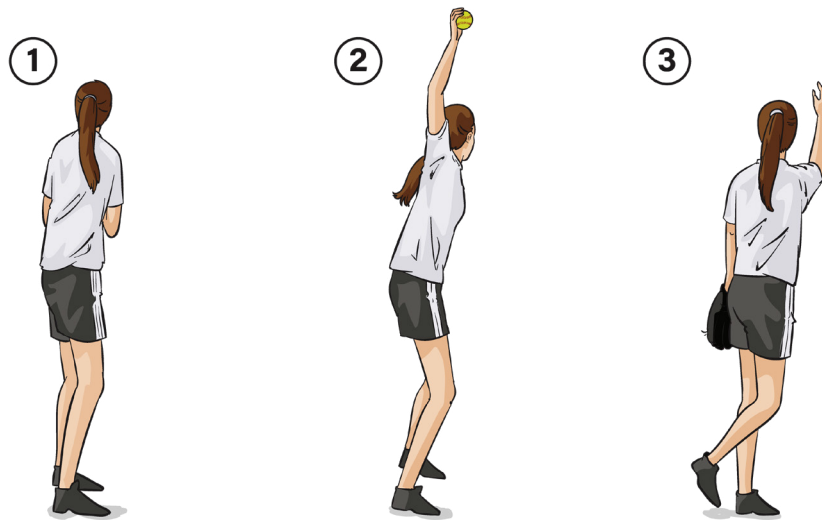
SNAP DRILL

PURPOSE

The goal of the Snap drill is to remove every other aspect of the pitch except the snap. This allows the pitcher to focus all of her energy on perfecting the art of a quick, tight snap; really feeling the ball peel off her fingers.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand about halfway between the mound and home plate, with a catcher at home plate.



SNAP DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will start off with her hips open (perpendicular to the catcher) and her feet on the power line, running from her back toe to the front toe and directly towards the catcher.
- 2 The ball should be gripped using the “C” fastball grip. If you are using a weighted ball, the middle finger should be on the stripe down the middle.
- 3 The pitcher will swing her arm back to around 10 o'clock, then come back through and release the pitch, staying tight on the hip and coming through with a tight, short snap. Finish with a full follow through, allowing the forearm to come up towards the face.

Complete 15 pitches with a weighted ball, or 25 pitches with a regulation ball.

COACHING TIPS

- If your girls are having a tough time understanding “hips open” versus “hips closed” - have them think of themselves as a door to the catcher – when they’re parallel to each other, the door is closed, and when they’re perpendicular, they’re open.
- The grip should be firm on the fingers but not resting in the palm of your hand. Sometimes younger pitchers have a tendency to put the thumb on the side of the ball – make sure you nip this in the bud or they’ll end up with a claw grip.
- This is a good drill to use with the weighted ball, as it allows your pitchers to really feel the ball coming off the index and middle fingers as they release the ball. With the middle finger right on the middle line of the weighted ball, we should be getting a nice, clean, “12 o’clock to 6 o’clock” rotation – not a bullet spin or some kind of twist.
- If you’ve got a pitcher who struggles to stay balanced through the pitch, have her start by swinging both arms equally to keep herself steady.

SNAP AND DRAG DRILL

PURPOSE

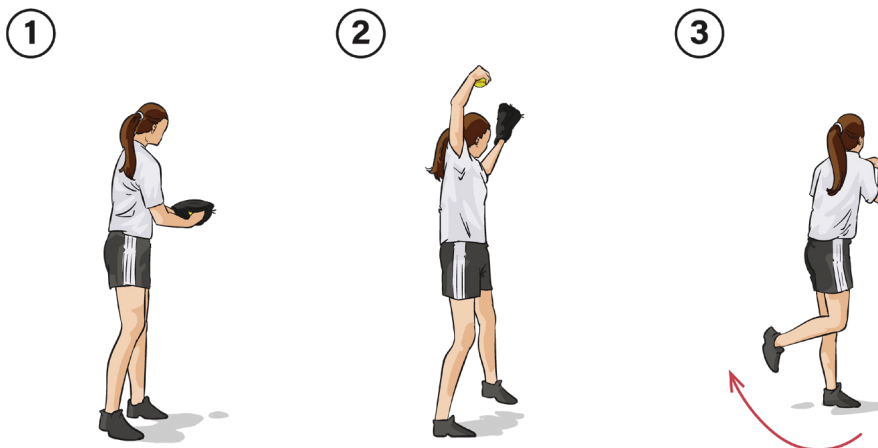
All pitchers will take a long step or “leap” out during the stride phase. However, girls softball rules do not allow a pitcher to become airborne during the pitch - it is illegal to have both feet in the air at the same time. That is why pitchers who use a “leaping” style must also “drag” the toe of the push-off foot on the ground until the stride foot touches down.

Typically, this toe drag will be on the inside of the toe of the shoe, and will make an arc pattern in the dirt starting at the pitching rubber and continuing toward the glove side for a foot or more.

In the Snap and Drag drill, we’re going to work on synchronizing the upper body and lower body - completing the snap, the stride and drag at the same time.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand about halfway between the mound and home plate, with a catcher at home plate.



SNAP AND DRAG DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 Begin in the same position as the Snap Drill, with the hips open (perpendicular to the catcher), feet on the power line and the ball in the "C" fastball grip
- 2 The pitcher will start with her arms forward, then swing back to 180 degrees, stride forward, then drag the back foot through as she snaps and releases the ball.

Complete 15 pitches with a weighted ball, or 25 pitches with a regulation ball.

COACHING TIPS

- The power from this pitching motion comes from the landing and push-back against the striding leg, which should stay firm as the back leg slashes across the dirt. This creates the resistance for the final arm whip and release of the pitch.
- The arm should stay tight as it comes across the hip with the pointer finger always pointed towards the belly button at the end of the snap. From there we let the arm come up naturally on the finish after, checking the ball for a good 12-6 rotation as it heads towards the plate.
- Avoid lifting up too soon or shortening the arm. Stay long, snap and drag.
- Keep the shoulders level on the release the pitch. No dipping down on the throwing-arm side.

WALK INTO PIVOT DRILL

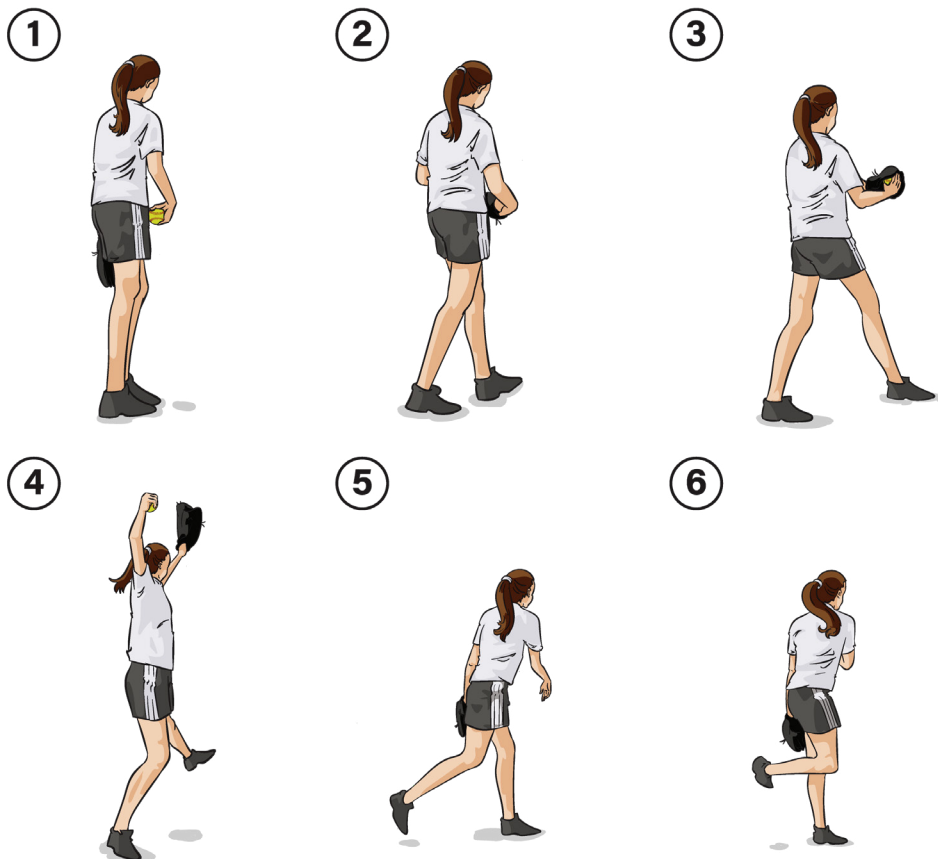
PURPOSE

In this drill, we will teach the pitcher how to transfer weight from the back leg to the front leg using an aggressive stride. Generally speaking, pitchers who have a longer (and faster) stride tend to throw with more velocity.

By emphasizing the long stride we force the pitcher to drive hard off the rubber with the push-off foot, and extend out toward the plate with more power.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand about halfway between the mound and home plate, with a catcher at home plate.



WALK INTO PIVOT DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will begin with her hips closed (parallel to the catcher), hands relaxed at her sides, holding the ball using the "C" fastball grip. The stride foot will be slightly ahead of the push-off foot.
- 2 She starts by "walking into" the power line, taking a short step with the push-off foot, then pivoting slightly to open her hips toward third base, while she takes a long, aggressive step with the stride foot.
- 3 During the stride, the arm will come back to 180 degrees. She will then whip the arm forward while closing her hips, release the ball and follow through while dragging the push off foot.

Complete 15 pitches with a weighted ball, or 25 pitches with a regulation ball.

COACHING TIPS

- If your pitcher is having trouble really extending out with a long stride, make sure she's getting the stride leg up high and driving aggressively from the push-off foot
- The ideal stride length will vary from pitcher to pitcher, but generally we like to see a stride that's 90% to 120% of her height.
- Younger pitchers should focus on perfecting the basic mechanics before attempting to increase their stride length.

TRANSITION DRILL

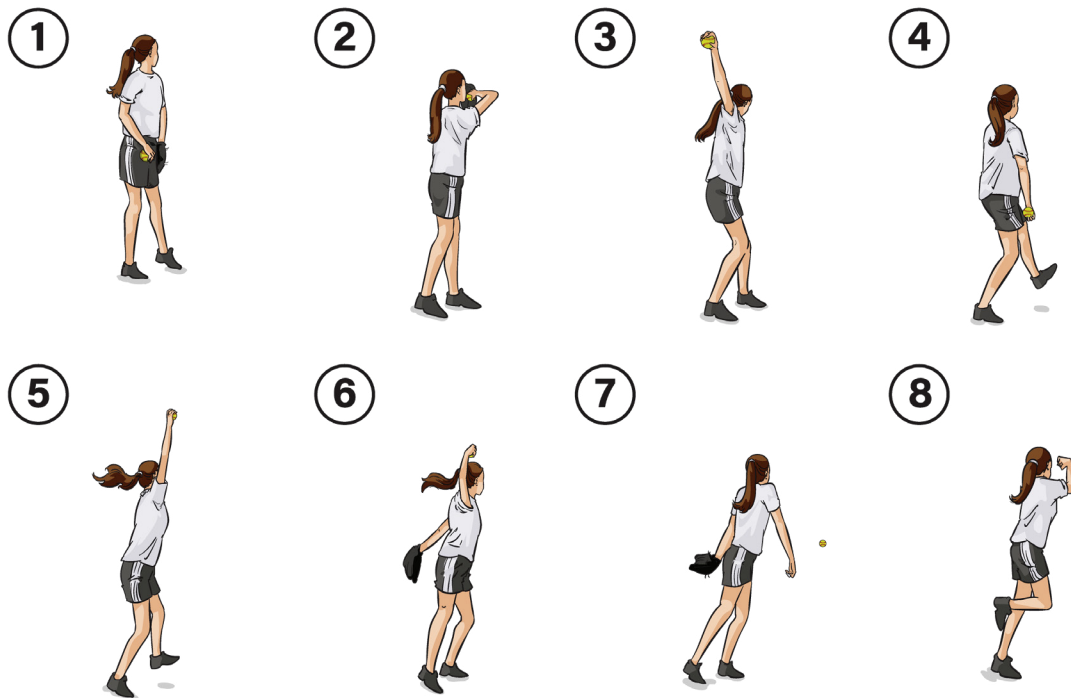
PURPOSE

This next drill will help us transition to making a full arm circle, while synchronizing the mechanics of the lower body with the upper body.

SETUP

Beginner pitchers should stand halfway between the plate and the mound, while intermediate or experienced pitchers can complete this drill from the full pitching distance. A catcher with full gear will be behind home plate.

We'll ditch the weighted ball and use a regulation ball for this and any other drill that uses a full arm circle.



TRANSITION DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will begin standing on the power line with the hips open, and hands together at waist level.
- 2 She starts by swinging the pitching arm back, then going through the complete arm circle motion while taking an aggressive stride.
- 3 She finishes the pitch with a tight snap, then follows through while dragging the push-off foot behind her.

Complete 15-25 pitches using a regulation ball.

COACHING TIPS

- Putting this all together can be tough, especially for younger pitchers, and will result in pitches flying in all directions. But make sure they keep at it and don't slow down any part of the pitch. They need to keep throwing hard and with solid mechanics and focus on just finding the right release point.
- It's a good idea to have even your more experienced pitchers throw from halfway, as it really forces them to get a good snap and tighten up their mechanics.
- Make sure your pitcher is landing the stride foot on the power line, ideally with the foot turned to an angle between 30 and 45 degrees.

POWER DRIVE DRILL

PURPOSE

This is a great drill for helping young pitchers increase their pitching velocity by recruiting more power from the legs and hips, and efficiently transferring it into the windmill pitching motion.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand on the mound with a regulation ball and a catcher behind the plate in full gear.

As the drill progresses, the pitcher will step back behind the mound to gradually increase the throwing distance. You can also use a small cone to encourage a longer, more aggressive stride.



POWER DRIVE DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will begin standing on the power line with the hips open, and hands together at waist level.
- 2 She starts by swinging the pitching arm back, then going through the complete arm circle motion while taking an aggressive stride.
- 3 She finishes the pitch with a tight snap, then follows through while dragging the push-off foot behind her.
- 4 Throw 5-10 pitches from the mound, then take three giant steps back to increase the distance.
- 5 Throw 5-10 pitches from that position, then take three more giant steps back
- 6 Throw 5-10 pitches from the final position

COACHING TIPS

- The pitcher should try to throw the ball on a rope, even as the distance increases. We want the ball to travel in a straight line to the plate – not on a big loopy arc.
- As pitchers move back away from the plate, there is a tendency to drop the front leg, not bringing it up nearly as high as it needs to be. Placing a small cone just in front of the stride foot will remind them to bring the stride leg up and over.
- If your pitcher needs help lengthening the stride, try placing the cone a few feet out in front of her stride foot, and making sure she steps past it with each pitch.

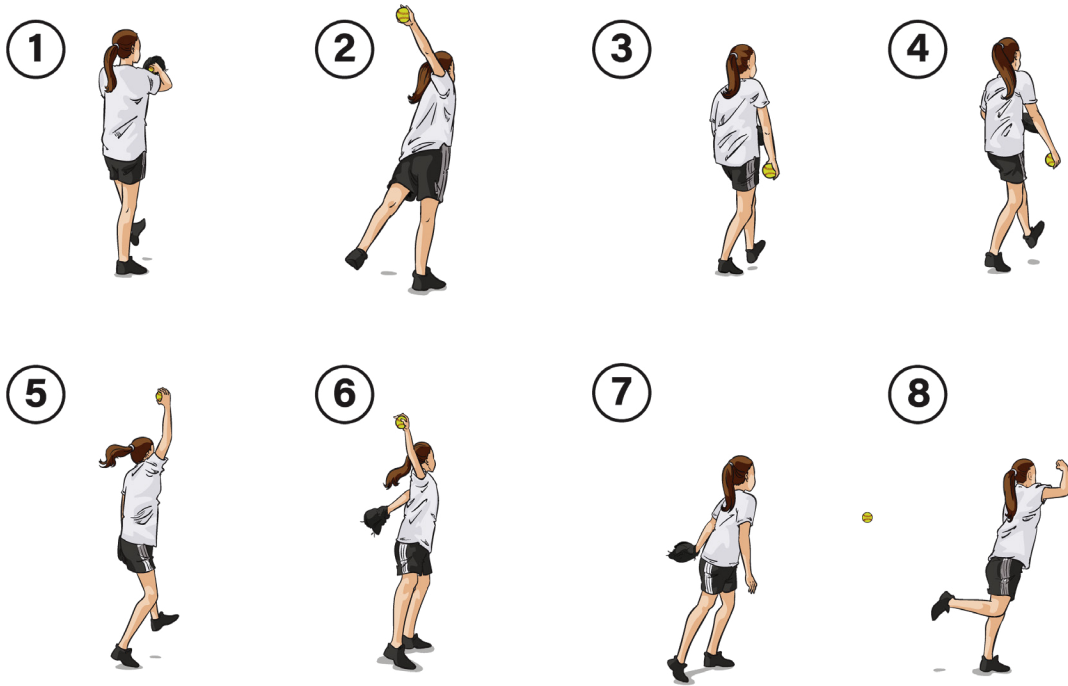
LEG DRIVE DRILL

PURPOSE

This next drill is fantastic for improving a pitcher's balance, while teaching her how to aggressively pivot her hips and generate more power.

SETUP

The pitcher will work from the mound in this drill using a regulation ball, with the catcher behind home plate.



LEG DRIVE DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will start on the mound with the hips closed (parallel to the catcher). She will be balancing on her push-off foot alone, with the stride leg straight and the stride foot raised six inches off the ground. The hands are together at waist level.
- 2 As she brings the pitching arm back she will also bring her stride leg back slightly, then kick forward into her arm circle and stride, while pushing aggressively off the back foot.
- 3 She will then complete the snap, release and follow through, while dragging the back foot.

COACHING TIPS

- The pitching arm and stride foot should swing back together, then forward together like a pendulum.
- For beginning pitchers, you can run the same drill but skip the full arm circle. Just bring the pitching arm back, stride forward and release.
- This drill will help with one of the more challenging elements of pitching mechanics - teaching girls to go “closed-open-closed” through the pitching motion. At the beginning of the drill, the hips are closed. But as the pitcher pivots off the back foot and takes her stride, the hips will open up, turning completely sideways to the catcher. Then as the pitcher releases the ball, her hips move back to a “half-closed” position, finishing in a fully closed “ready” fielding position on the follow through.

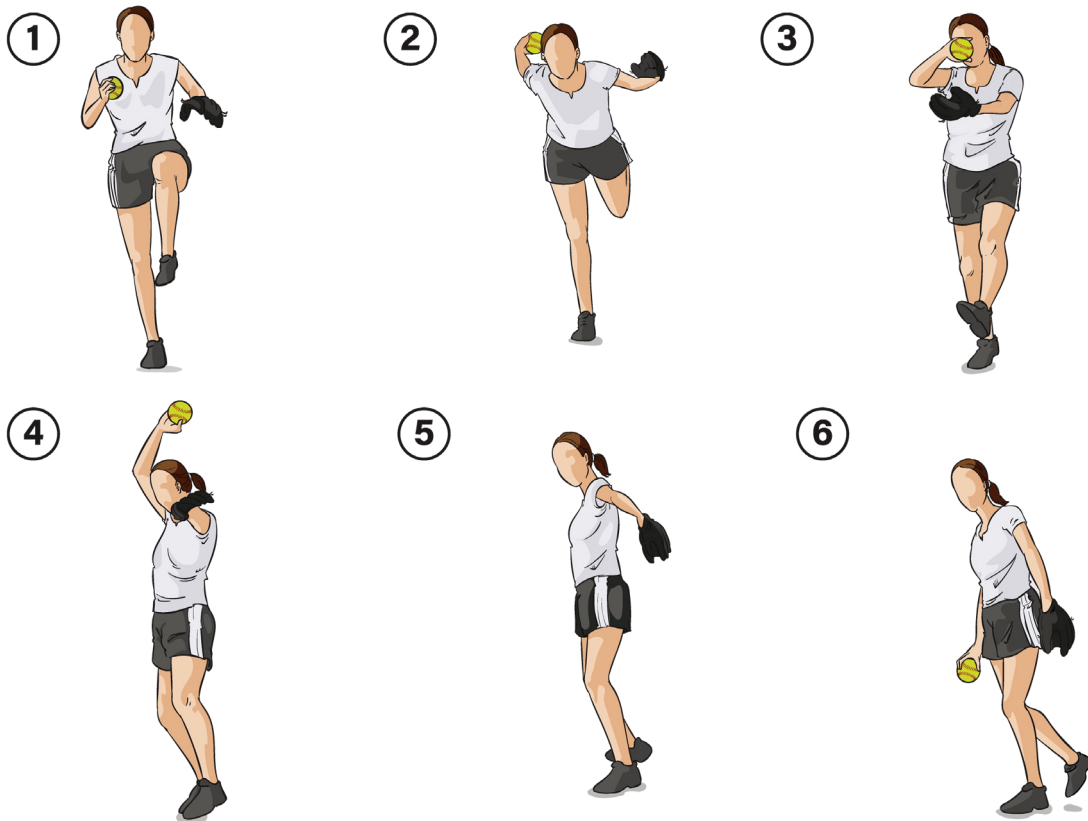
KARATE KID DRILL

PURPOSE

Much like the previous drill, this will help keep your pitcher on the power line with her stride, while pivoting aggressively and pushing off the back leg. The added difficulty of bringing the stride knee up will also challenge your pitcher's balance and concentration.

SETUP

Depending on the strength of the pitcher, this drill will be done either from in front of, or on the mound, with the catcher parked behind home plate.



KARATE KID DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will start on the mound with the hips closed (parallel to the catcher). She will be balancing on her push-off foot alone, with the stride leg up off the ground and the knee bent at a 90 degree angle (not unlike the “crane” pose from Karate Kid). The hands are together at waist level.
- 2 The pitcher will then rock backwards, bringing the pitching arm back and bending at the waist so the stride leg kicks back and the stride knee points straight down to the ground.
- 3 From there, and stride leg back so the stride knee is pointing straight down to the ground. As she brings the pitching arm back she will also bring her stride leg back slightly, then kick forward into her arm circle and stride, while pushing aggressively off the back foot.
- 4 She will then kick forward into her arm circle and stride, while pushing aggressively off the back foot, complete the snap, release, follow through and drag.

COACHING TIPS

- It can be a good idea to add the cone in for this drill as well, to give the pitcher a visual goal for that stride forward.
- During this entire sequence, make sure that the pitchers head stays relaxed and straight. Don't the head to turn sideways, or become overly tense in the neck and shoulders. If a pitcher is consistently missing to the left or right, her head may be tilting in that direction.

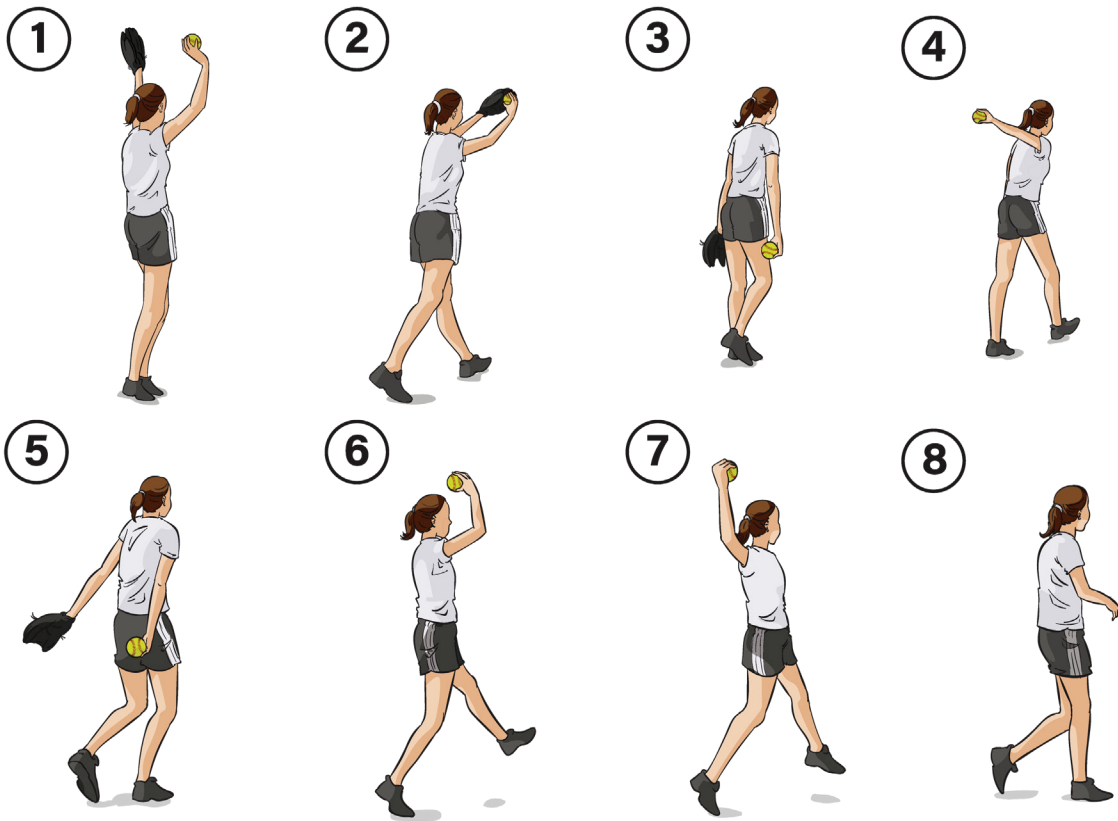
WALK THROUGH DRILL

PURPOSE

The walk through drill is a fantastic pre-practice or pre-game warm up drill, and a great way for any pitcher to get into a good pitching rhythm. Walking into the pitch will help generate some momentum and allow the pitcher to work toward the full speed pitch in a safer, more natural way.

SETUP

The pitcher will start off a couple steps behind the mound with a regulation ball, and the catcher behind home plate.



WALK THROUGH DRILL

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher begins with her hips closed, arms above her head, and stride foot slightly in front of the push off foot.
- 2 She will then walk into her full pitching motion, taking a small step with the stride foot, then another step with the push-off foot while bringing the pitching arm back.
- 3 Next, the pitcher goes into her arm circle and stride, pushing aggressively off the back foot, then completing the snap, release, follow through and drag.

COACHING TIPS

- Remember to open up the hips during the arm circle, then close them back up as you move through the release and follow through
- To get more speed behind your fastball, it's essential to have a "push-back" against the stride during the release phase. This provides the resistance for the action of the arm as it goes through the final downswing into the release of the pitch. To achieve the proper "push-back" the stride leg should be slightly bent to cushion the landing, then firm up as the ball leaves the hand.

LONG TOSS DRILL

PURPOSE

The long toss drill is great for helping a pitcher get loose and build confidence, almost working like a resistance drill.

After the pitcher has gone to the edge of her range with the long toss, stepping back to the mound and throwing strikes at the plate is a superb way to finish off any warm-up.

SETUP

This drill runs similar to the walk through drill, but also adds in the challenge of throwing from increasing pitching distances.

The pitcher will start off behind the mound with a regulation ball, slowly working backwards from that point. The catcher will stay behind the plate - however it can be helpful for them to stand up to increase their catch radius.

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher begins with her hips closed, arms above her head, and stride foot slightly in front of the push off foot.
- 2 She will then walk into her full pitching motion, taking a small step with the stride foot, then another step with the push-off foot while bringing the pitching arm back.
- 3 Next, the pitcher goes into her arm circle and stride, pushing aggressively off the back foot, then completing the snap, release, follow through and drag.
- 4 The pitcher will throw two walk through pitches from this location then take three giant steps back and throw two more.
- 5 She will continue increasing the distance, three steps at a time, until she is at the very edge of her pitching range, just short of where she would need to one hop the pitch. Here, at the edge of her range have her deliver ten more pitches to the plate
- 6 Finally, have her step back to the mound and throw ten strikes from there to finish off the drill.

COACHING TIPS

- Unlike the Power Drive drill we discussed earlier, this drill allows the pitchers to put as much loft as they need on the ball to get it to home plate.
- It's a good idea to have the catcher stand up for this distance portion of this drill so that the pitcher doesn't feel the pressure to try and throw strikes - the focus is just getting the ball to the plate without it touching the dirt.

RAPID FIRE DRILL

PURPOSE

If you have a pitcher who has mechanical issues that stem from over thinking (such as pushing the ball, slowing down through the wind-up, or over-aiming), this next drill does a great job of forcing the pitcher to stop thinking and just pitch.

Aside from the benefits of fixing broken mechanics, it's also a fantastic endurance drill.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand at the mound with a partner (parent, coach or another player), and a bucket of 25 balls. The catcher will be behind home plate.

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will go through her full pitching motion, focusing on getting through the 25 balls as quickly as possible.
- 2 Immediately after each pitch the catcher will discard that ball, while the pitcher receives a new ball from the bucket.

COACHING TIPS

- Mechanics still come first, so we don't want to sacrifice proper form to get the ball out quicker. But the purpose of the drill is speed, so the pitcher she should be going through the pitches as fast as possible while still maintaining the integrity of her pitching motion.
- Try giving the partner a stopwatch and timing how long it takes to complete the 25 pitches. Track the times over the course of a season, and see if she can break her own records.

CONTROL DRILLS

As pitchers mature and play against better competition, the importance of command and control increases dramatically. Being able to throw strikes is not enough. Effective pitchers will need to learn how to locate their strikes in difficult to hit areas.

The following drills are all focused on pitching control, and will help pitchers to become more accurate and effective on the mound.

HIT THE BOX DRILL

PURPOSE

This next drill teaches players how to keep the ball down and improve accuracy. We do this by providing them with a visual strike zone – the size of a piece of paper– that is much smaller than a normal strike zone.

EXECUTION

With everything in position, the pitcher will then begin to throw pitches from regulation distance, trying to hit the box. The pitcher will be imagining each set of 6 pitches as an at bat, with the goal to throw three strikes before walking the batter.

SETUP

For this drill to work best, you want to find a hill with a slight incline. For the target, we use a computer paper box for 8.5 by 11 paper, but if you can't find one, any small box can work as a target. You're also going to need a stool or a chair to put the box on, ideally about a foot off the ground.

Then measure out your regulation pitching distance down the hill from the box, and have your pitcher line up there. Once the pitchers have gotten the hang of the drill, you can even move them back slightly.

COACHING TIPS

Generally speaking, keeping pitches down is a much safer proposition than the opposite for any pitcher. 12 inches off the ground is a perfect distance, as a pitch in this location will be called a strike more often than not, and even when it isn't, most batters will be unable to swing and send a grounder into the infield if they manage to make any contact.

FOUR CORNERS DRILL

PURPOSE

The purpose of the four corners drill is to teach your pitcher how to control and locate her fastball all over the plate. She should be maintaining her mechanics, coming through with a tight quick snap, and aiming inside and outside by moving their stride foot placement on the power line appropriately.

EXECUTION

To start off, our pitcher is going to assume they are facing a right handed batter. Using just the fastball, the pitcher will then go on and work the four corners of the plate, starting off high and outside in Box A. Next, the pitcher will throw low and outside, to Box B, high and inside to Box C, and then low and inside to Box D. The pitcher will finish off the round by throwing a fastball right down the middle to Box E.

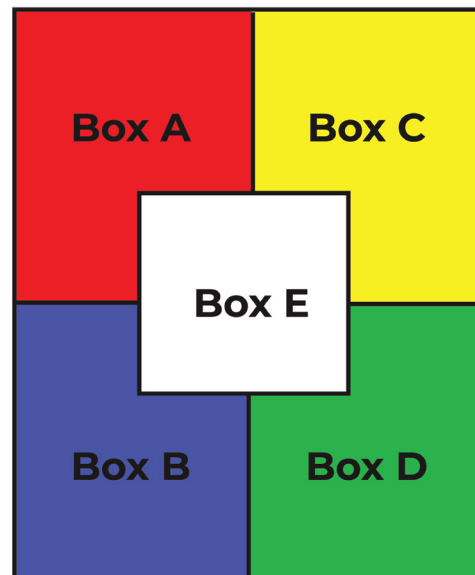
The pitcher will not move on to the next box until they have successfully thrown a strike in the box.

COACHING TIPS

Set up your pitchers in two lines. If you have more than two pitchers, set up teams. Set a time limit of 5 minutes. Have each pitcher throw to the four corners, again moving on only when they hit the proper spot. If you have pitcher teams, the pitchers rotate with each pitch. At the end of the five minutes, whichever team has successfully made it around the rotation the most wins.

SETUP

The pitcher will line up at the mound, with the catcher behind home plate. You also have the option of having a coach stand in the batter's box (with a helmet) to better simulate throwing the ball inside and outside.



BASKETBALL TARGET DRILL

PURPOSE

Here we have a great drill for teaching your pitcher control. By giving our pitcher a visual target for them to hit, we end up with a great drill for improving both accuracy and velocity.

EXECUTION

The pitchers will then proceed to throw fastballs at home plate, trying to knock the basketball off the tee. This drill works great as a competition as well – you can set your pitchers up in a line, put five minutes on the clock, and then have the pitchers compete to see who can knock the ball off the tee the most times. Or even set up two lines, each with their own tee, and make it a competition between the two teams to get the most balls knocked off the tee.

SETUP

For this drill our pitcher is going to stand at the mound, and we'll place a basketball onto a batting tee on home plate.

COACHING TIPS

If you want to make things more difficult, you can put a different ball in the tee. Moving down in a progression from basketball, to soccer ball, to dodge ball is a great way to really test your pitchers ability to hit the target.

VELOCITY DRILLS

The following drills are focused on increasing fastball speed and power by working on the individual elements of the pitching motion, from the leg drive, to the arm circle to the whip.

WALL THROWS

PURPOSE

This drill focuses on increasing speed by generating a faster arm circle and whip before the release.

SETUP

Pitchers stand as close to a wall as possible while still being able to complete the entire arm circle freely. For safety, this drill should use a softie instead of a regular ball.

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will begin with her hips open to the wall, back swing, complete the arm circle and pitch the ball as hard and fast as she can into the wall. Focus on putting 100% power behind each pitch, which will translate to more speed.
- 2 After 5 pitches directly into the wall, take one step back and continue the drill. Take another 5 pitches, then an additional step back.
- 3 When the pitcher a point where the ball is losing velocity before it contacts the wall, take a step back in and complete the set from that position.

Complete 20-25 pitches.

COACHING TIPS

The goal over time is to extend the pitcher's range from the wall to full pitching distance, while feeling like she is hitting the wall just as hard from that position as she is from directly in front of it.

There is a variation on this drill that targets endurance. Standing in the original spot next to the wall, the pitcher will throw as many balls as she can in a one-minute period, focusing as always on completing each pitch with total power.

CIRCLE SPEED DRILL

PURPOSE

This drill improves a pitcher's arm rotation speed, which will increase her arm strength, flexibility and fastball velocity.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand halfway between the mound and home plate (or at the mound for older players), with a regulation ball and a catcher behind home plate.

EXECUTION

- 1 Begin with the hips open to the catcher, and stride foot extended slightly more than shoulder width ahead of the push off foot. The glove hand should be at shoulder height (3 o'clock on the Arm Circle clock we used earlier).
- 2 Make three fast circles with the pitching arm, and release the ball on the third rotation. Repeat for five reps.
- 3 Next, make two fast circles and release the ball on the second rotation. Repeat for five reps.
- 4 Finally, make one circle and release the ball on the first rotation. Repeat for five reps.

COACHING TIPS

The arm and shoulder should stay relaxed and under control. If the pitcher feels any pain in the shoulder, stop immediately. The shoulder must be relaxed enough that it can rotate quickly without pain, but players should never push through shoulder pain.

Arm speed should be consistent and fast the whole way around. Advanced pitchers can add in a "whip" increasing the speed even more during the final portion of the armswing just before the release.

RUG DRILL

PURPOSE

This next drill is a great option for working on improving velocity when your pitcher doesn't have the luxury of throwing pitches outdoors.

SETUP

Your pitcher will need a big heavy tarp or carpet, and a something she can hang it over, like an exposed beam in the basement or a rafter in the garage.

EXECUTION

With the tarp set up, the pitcher just needs to stand in front of it and, using her full pitching motion, throw as hard as she can. While we want to maintain solid mechanics, don't worry about too much about control – just throw the pitch with everything you can muster.

Complete 2-4 sets of 25 pitches.

COACHING TIPS

Since she doesn't need to worry about balls and strikes, have your pitcher do her best to try and outdo herself with every pitch, throwing with more and more power each time.

STRIDE EXTENDER DRILL

PURPOSE

This next drill is a fantastic way to teach a pitcher how to use her body to generate more speed and power. Many pitchers make the mistake of pitching with just their arms, severely limiting their pitching power.

SETUP

The pitcher will pitch from her normal position at the mound, but you'll need a coach with some tape as well as a catcher at home plate for this drill.

EXECUTION

The drill will begin with the pitcher throwing a fastball to home plate. After the first pitch has been thrown, the coach will step in and place a piece of tape where the drive food landed.

Now the pitcher will go back to the mound and pitch again, however this time the pitcher must have their drive foot land beyond that piece of tape. The pitcher will continue doing this, continuing to throw strikes and move forward until they reach the edge of the circle.

COACHING TIPS

A good drive forward has benefits other than just improving pitch power. It also moves the pitcher's release point closer to the plate, providing a shorter time for the hitter to analyze the pitch.

STEP BACK THROW

PURPOSE

Up next we have another drill that will help to increase pitching power. By moving the pitcher back away from the mound and then forward back to it, we force her to increase her leg drive as the distance increases, as she will be unable to reach the plate otherwise.

Then, when she's moving back in, she will use that same extra leg drive she discovered from the farthest distance and apply it to the shorter pitch, increasing velocity.

EXECUTION

This is another fastball drill, kicked off by the pitcher throwing her first strike from the mound. After the first strike, she'll take five steps back and throw a strike from there.

It's important the pitcher maintain her natural pitching motion, focusing on increasing the distance on her pitches with her legs.

After throwing a strike from five steps behind the mound, she'll take another five steps back, putting her 10 steps back in total. She'll throw another strike there, and then move another five steps back, continuing this cycle until she gets to second base. Once she's thrown a strike from second base, she'll begin working in the opposite direction, moving forward five steps after each strike thrown.

Once the pitcher has gone to second base and back to the mound, she has completed one rep. To complete the drill, she will make that trip a total of three times to finish up the drill.

COACHING TIPS

One way of adding higher stakes to this drill is to record how many pitches it takes each pitcher to complete the drill. The pitchers will compete to see who can complete the drill in the fewest amount of pitches, doing their best to beat their other teammates.

SETUP

The pitcher will start off standing at the mound, with the catcher behind home plate.

GAME PREPARATION DRILLS

The following drills are designed to simulate a game situation, and involve some added mental pressure that comes from throwing balls and strikes against a real (or imagined) batter.

20-4 DRILL

PURPOSE

The 20-4 drill (or 10-3 drill) works on accuracy and control, while building confidence.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand halfway between the mound and home plate (or at the mound for older players), with a regulation ball and a catcher behind home plate.

EXECUTION

The goal of this drill is to throw 20 strikes for every 4 balls pitched. If the pitcher is unable to reach 20 strikes before throwing 4 balls, the drill starts over.

For younger players, the goal is throw 10 strikes for every 3 balls.

COACHING TIPS

- Set a reasonable number of total pitches for this drill and for the entire pitching workout. For kids under 12, 100 total pitches in one day is a good limit. For kids 13 and older, 150 total pitches is a good limit.
- Adjust the difficulty of the drill depending on the experience level of the pitcher. Allow younger kids to pitch from closer in and throw at less than full velocity to make sure they throw strikes. One of the goals here is to build confidence, so put the pitcher in a position to succeed at first, then challenge their skills as they get better.

DUMMY BATTER DRILL

PURPOSE

This drill will help pitchers work on the control in a game-like situation, without risking a real batter getting hit by a pitch.

SETUP

Create or purchase a cutout shape of a batter in her stance, and place it in the batter's box. The pitcher stands on the mound with a regulation ball, and a catcher in full gear behind home plate.

As an alternative, you can create pitching targets and attach them to a fence or wall, then place the dummy batter next to them.

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will go through her complete pitching motion while trying to hit specific spots in relation to the dummy batter. The catcher will indicate a target inside the strike zone using her glove, then receive the pitch.
- 2 Begin by throwing fastballs, then move onto changeups, then breaking pitches. Always trying to hit the spot indicated by the catcher (or wall/fence target).

COACHING TIPS

- When a pitcher is learning a new pitch or tweaking her aim, the chances of a batter getting hit with a ball are pretty high. With the dummy batter, batters stay safe and the pitcher is free to experiment as necessary.
- The dummy batter drill can be used for much more than developing control. It is also a great pitching tool for learning new pitches, especially pitches like the drop, curve, rise, and screw. Since pitchers will have to practice over and over to develop the proper ball movement, having a dummy batter there will lend some game-like consistency to their workouts.
- This drill is also a great opportunity for working on a pitcher's visualization skills. She should take a second to visualize in her mind the path that the ball will take when she throws it. Imagine the trajectory of the ball from the release point alongside the hip, all the way into the catcher's mitt.

TIME SET DRILL

PURPOSE

The Time Set drill is a fantastic way to keep pitchers focused and motivated during a workout, and prevent them from getting distracted or mentally fatigued.

SETUP

The pitcher will line up at the mound, with the catcher back behind home plate. The coach will observe the drill with a stop watch and track the pitches thrown.

EXECUTION

- 1 Set the stopwatch to three minutes and have the pitcher throw one specific type of pitch for the entire duration.
- 2 With younger pitchers, you can focus on throwing fastballs down the middle. With more advanced pitchers you can try hitting locations, throwing off speed pitches, or some combination of the two.
- 3 After the three minutes are up, take a 30 second break, then begin again, aiming for a different location or throwing a different type of pitch. You can also try alternating locations (inside then outside) or alternating pitches (fastball then changeup) within each set.

Complete three sets of three minutes each.

COACHING TIPS

- When the pitchers are alternating inside and outside, allow them one correction pitch if they miss their target before moving on to the next pitch – meaning if they're aiming outside and they miss, they get one more chance to throw the outside pitch, then they move on to an inside pitch on the next pitch regardless of what happens.
- The only thing that changes when throwing inside or outside is where the pitcher strides in relation to the power line. Step left to throw left, and right to throw right. The arm circle, release, and follow through stay constant.

THREE OUTS DRILL

PURPOSE

This is another great drill for keeping pitchers focused during a workout. Instead of a time limit, we're going to simulate a game situation by having the pitcher get three outs against an imaginary opponent.

SETUP

The pitcher will line up at the mound, with the catcher back behind home plate. The coach will observe the drill, call balls and strikes, and track the pitches thrown.

EXECUTION

The pitcher will attempt to strike out three imaginary batters while Coach calls balls and strikes.

COACHING TIPS

To increase the difficulty, don't allow the pitcher to just fire fastballs down the middle. See if she can throw different types of pitches to different locations, while consistently hitting the strike zone.

CONDITIONING DRILLS

In past years, a lot of attention has been directed toward addressing arm injuries in baseball. The conventional wisdom has been that baseball pitching puts undue strain on the arm while softball pitching is a more “natural” motion.

But recent studies suggest that the windmill pitching motion is far from “natural” and actually places stresses on the arm and shoulder similar to the overhand throw.

This shouldn’t be a surprise. Any explosive movement that’s repeated over and over will wear out the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the body, especially if they are not properly conditioned to begin with.

The following section covers four proven drills that will help to strengthen the pitcher’s entire kinetic chain, from the stride and push-off foot, to the core, to the upper body, shoulder, arm and wrist.

All of these exercises are designed to help softball pitchers specifically, but you can also augment them with traditional exercises like push-ups, planks, and crunches.

SINGLE LEG SQUATS

PURPOSE

This is a challenging exercise designed to help a pitcher improve her power and balance. A steady diet of single leg squats will have your pitcher not only exploding off the drive leg with more power, but also landing on the stride leg with more stability.

SETUP

All the pitcher needs for this next drill is an open area where she can move around without anything in the way.

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher will go up onto one leg and bring the hands in tight, then slowly squat down as far she can go.
 - 2 Keep the weight roughly in the middle of your foot, basically on the ball, with the hips and shoulders both even and level.
-

Repeat for 3 sets of 10 on each leg, building up the reps as the athlete builds strength.

COACHING TIPS

- This is a softball specific exercise, so while you may have seen single leg squats done differently before, that's because these are designed to translate directly to the pitching motion.
- We want to develop the stride leg into a firm foundation for the rest of the pitch, which will severely reduce the risk of injury for both the shoulder and lower body.

LUNGE WITH UPPER BODY ROTATION

PURPOSE

While some pitchers may have good core strength when in traditional positions, core control while outstretched onto the stride leg and delivering a pitch is where it counts. This next drill is focused on just that, improving the strength of the abdomen while the lower body is extended.

SETUP

The pitcher will need about 10-15 feet to complete this as a walking lunge – but it can also be done while staying in the same position if necessary. As you progress with this drill, you can also incorporate a light weight - anywhere from 5-10 pounds is fine if shoulder strength is sufficient.

EXECUTION

- 1 Starting from an athletic position, the pitcher will lunge forward, far enough that she gets a 90 degree bend in both legs on each stride.
- 2 At the bottom of the lunge, the pitcher will extend her arms out straight and rotate at the waist from side to side, first to the stride foot side, then the push off foot side, then back to the middle before stepping forward again.
- 3 Throughout the entire exercise, the shoulders and hips should remain level, with the chest up, shoulders back and core engaged.

Start with 3 sets of 10-15 reps, and increase either the reps or weight as you build strength and the drill gets easier.

COACHING TIPS

- To start out, allow the athlete to complete this exercise without any additional weight. Focus on getting the form correct, making a slow and controlled lunge and maintaining balance throughout.
- Once she has that mastered, add in the light weight and have her hold it out in front of the body and rotate it from side to side while keeping the core tight and arms straight.
- If you want to complete this drill in a smaller space, use standing lunges instead. Stride forward with one leg, then push back to a standing position. Then stride forward with the other leg, push back and repeat, alternating the leg each time.

NEWSPAPER DRILL

PURPOSE

Grip strength is very important for all pitchers, and can become an even bigger factor when it comes to learning breaking pitches. This next drill focuses on improving the pitcher's strength in the forearm and hands.

EXECUTION

This drill is fairly simple. Whenever your pitcher walks by the stack of newspapers, she grabs one sheet and balls it up with her pitching hand. It will give her a light burn at first, but by the end of the day she'll have done a fair bit to increase her strength without even interrupting her routine.

SETUP

All your pitcher will need to do for this drill is put a large stack of newspapers somewhere in their home that they walk by on a consistent basis.

COACHING TIPS

If a pitcher has been doing this a long time, she can make it even harder on the hand by either increasing the thickness of the stack she balls up, or just grabbing two separate sheets (one at a time) each time she walks by the pile.

WRIST SNAP STRENGTHENING DRILL

PURPOSE

In this drill, we will develop strength in the wrist snap, by completely isolating it from the rest of the pitch.

EXECUTION

- 1 The pitcher begins with her hips open to the target and feet shoulder width apart.
- 2 With the non-throwing hand, hold the forearm of the pitching arm just above the wrist.
- 3 Cock the pitching hand back and snap it forward, attempting to hit the wall as hard as you can.

Complete 3 sets of 10-15 reps.

SETUP

The pitcher will stand around 5 feet from a wall or partner with a regular ball or softie ball.

COACHING TIPS

- To increase the difficulty of this drill, you can also complete it from farther out (up to 8 feet) or using a weighted ball
- In addition to the conditioning benefit, this drill is great for warming up before games or practices.

TROUBLESHOOTING DRILLS

No matter how much you focus on the fundamentals, it's very common for young pitchers to develop bad habits or mechanical glitches.

Below are three of the most common mistakes pitchers make, and some simple drills you can use to correct them.

PROBLEM #1: FRONT SIDE BREAKING DOWN

A very common problem, especially with younger pitchers is allowing the stride leg to break down as they release the ball at the end of the pitch.

To get more speed behind your fastball, it's essential to have a "push-back" against the stride leg during the release phase. This provides the resistance for the action of the arm as it goes through the final downswing into the release of the pitch.

If a pitcher's stride leg is bent at landing, it's virtually impossible to throw a powerful pitch.

HOW TO FIX IT

To fix this, practice running the Snap Drill, while paying special attention to the landing of the stride foot.

The pitcher needs to keep a firm front side, similar to how a hitter keeps a firm stride foot to generate more power in the swing.

At impact, the stride leg should have the knee slightly bent to cushion the landing, as the pitcher's weight is temporarily shifted forward. But then, just as in hitting, the pitcher will need to "block" the stride leg and push back against it.

At the exact point the pitch leaves her hand the stride leg should be straightened out and at an angle of around 20 degrees. The shoulders should be mostly closed (parallel to the catcher) and the hips should be around halfway closed.

After the follow through, the hips will close completely and the pitcher will assume the fielding "ready" position.

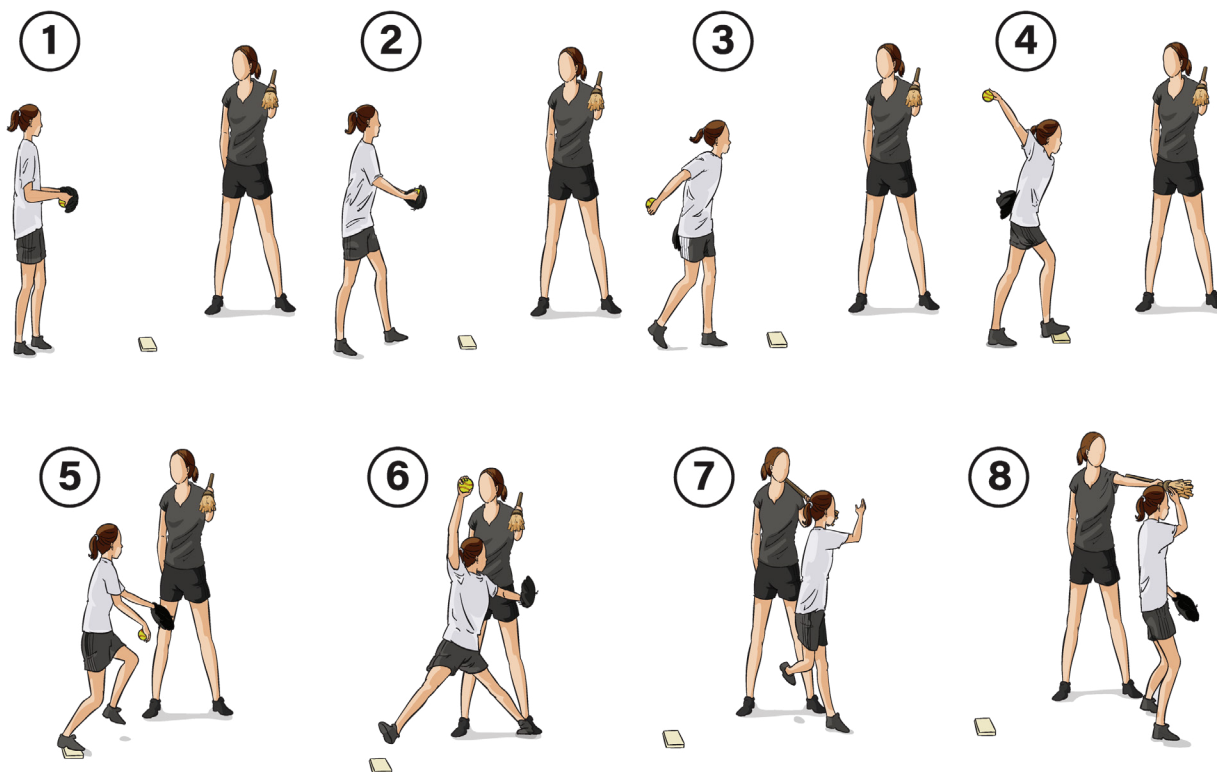
PROBLEM #2: LEADING WITH THE HEAD

Another issue that arises, especially in younger pitchers, is being bent at the waist, leaning forward and leading with the head (instead of leading with the stride foot).

HOW TO FIX IT

Standing a couple feet in front of the mound on the pitcher's glove side, hold out either a broomstick, pool noodle or other (safe) object at about eye level for the pitcher. The pitcher will then go through her pitching motion, with this obstacle serving as a mental reminder not to lead with the head.

We don't want any contact with the object, so make sure you've positioned yourself far enough in front that that won't happen, but close enough that the pitcher knows not to bend at the waist.



BROOMSTICK DRILL

PROBLEM #3: BAD ARM CIRCLE

Our third trouble shooting drill is for helping a pitcher who struggles with the mechanics of the arm-circle. The correct trajectory is with the arm coming up by the ear, reaching tall at the top, coming down off the ear, and then tight to the body as it comes down into the hip area.

HOW TO FIX IT

Most pitchers who have this problem tend to start the arm circle off too wide, making it difficult to get back on the correct axis as they go into the whip and release.

One simple solution for this is to practice pitching a wall or fence on the pitching arm side. Simply have the pitcher do the walk through drill from this position and they will be forced to stay properly aligned as they come up and down through the pitching motion.

MORE TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Thanks for reading this report!

If you haven't had a chance yet, you can upgrade your order to include the Ultimate Softball Pitching Drills online video clinic by going here now:

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You'll get step by step video demonstrations for all the mechanical drills included in this report, plus dozens of useful coaching tips to accelerate your results!

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