

Pitching

Introduction

Expecting and getting Little League pitchers to hit their spots and consistently throw strikes is challenging. That's because many youth baseball pitchers haven't developed the techniques and mechanics just yet that will allow them to be successful.



For many 8-13 years olds, pitching from the stretch and not the full windup can be helpful.

- First, there's very little if any loss in velocity, with a greater ability for consistent control as they build their confidence.
- Second, there's generally less that can go wrong mechanically, and it can allow for faster development of some key parts before introducing the windup, which will add some possible flaws, such as the momentum of pushing the lower or upper body out too fast, creating imbalance at leg lift, which then sets off a cycle of the body being out of sequence for that pitch and creating inconsistent control and a possible sore arm.

Pitching from the stretch allows most of the major parts of the delivery to be developed correctly, and muscle memory built in before bringing another piece of the pitching puzzle. It's kind of like putting the frame (or outside) of a puzzle together before working on the middle.

When you are coaching players to pitch, take it in stages, and don't try to fix everything at once. The following 13 youth baseball pitching techniques could be broken down even further, but by using these as a guide you won't get caught up over-analyzing every detail.

Youth Pitching Techniques

1. Mental
2. Set-up
3. Rocker step and lead leg lift
4. Balance
5. Hand position
6. Lead leg down and hand separation
7. Weight shift (body movement)
8. Arm action
9. Shoulders
10. Lead foot plant and knee action
11. Back (post) foot action
12. Hip rotation
13. Release, follow-through, and finish

1. Mental



Have pitchers develop a routine, what they do between every pitch, both mentally and physically.

- What's the game situation,
- How many outs, the count,
- What to do if the ball is hit to them, where should I throw it for the out?
- Approach the mound the same all the time and develop a style and routine that helps put the whole pitching process of mechanics and the

2. Set-up

On the mound they need to clear their mind visualize where the ball is going and freeze for a split second to dial in on their muscle memory and target.

Gripping the ball and placing it in the mitt the same way each time is part of this routine. The ball should not be placed in the back of the hand, it should be on the last 2 knuckles of the longer fingers, and not squeezed to tight. Throwing balls well short of the mound is one sign of squeezing the ball to tight.

Tell pitchers to "Find a dime," they will then know to instantly look at the catcher's mitt, and visualize a dime in the mitt, not the whole mitt. This helps get them focused.



3. Rocker step and lead leg lift



For the stretch, they need to get on the mound in the stretch position, the lead leg should be about 2-3 feet in front of the mound (rubber) and the ball in the pitchers hand.

They first focus, take a breath, move the lead foot back to the mound at the same time the hands comes together about chest high, and a pause and focus: "Find the dime."

Then lead leg lift naturally and without a jerky motion preferably the knee goes between the belt and chest high and hands together (not against the chest, but a couple of inches from it).

From the windup position, the (what will be) back or lead foot should only go back and a little to the side about 3-6 inches. Any more than this gets the body out of balance and starts a negative sequence, where for the rest of that pitch, all of the moving parts are having to get re-balanced and in proper timing (which usually doesn't happen) to make the pitch.

From the windup the sliding the back foot into position on the mound and the swivel action of the hips to get the body turned sideways on the mound is an important part of the process to staying in balance, and not swinging around too far so the back faces the batter.



4. Balance



Balance when pitching can be a challenge for little league players but is one of the most critical parts that must be mastered for: Keeping a weight centered will help with a number of things including:

- Consistent control,
- Velocity and
- Reduced arm stress.

5. Hand position (mitt and ball)

The throw or pitch begins at the center of the body.

The ball hand and mitt should stay together until the lead leg starts to move down, remember, leg goes down, hands go apart.

The hands should stay about chest high (for timing reasons) until they separate.



6. Lead leg down and hand separation



The lead leg goes down and out, not out, over and down. The toes should hang down slightly. If the heel of the lead leg is down, this can open the hips and shoulders too early and cost your pitcher velocity, control, and a sore arm.

There's several important aspects of the lead arm and pitching arm during separation that are shown in our guides and the affects of what happens with variations of this.

The hands do go in opposite directions, but not like the karate kid, the lead arm stays a little bent and using the elbow as a site to the target, the pitching arm goes back towards 2nd with the thumb under the ball and the ball moves from facing 2nd base to rotating as the arm moves into the High-L (or cocked) position.

7. Weight shift (body movement)

"Staying back" over the back (post) leg as long as possible while maintaining good balance and body position is one of the main ingredients to power and velocity. Staying back and not moving our in front too early harnesses the power in the hips until the lead foot plants, at that moment is the uncoiling of the spring (hips), and if the sequence has proper timing and the pitching arm and shoulders are in the right position, maximum velocity and control will be seen. If the top of the body moves out too soon then most of the power from the hips is lost and places the additional load on the shoulder.



8. Arm Action

The pitching arm should be moving in sequence and timed to be at the high-L at foot plant. If the arm is too quick or too slow there's loss of power and stress on the arm. The part of this sequence is better seen in our guides. It's important that the pitching elbow from the high-L to just before release be at or slightly above shoulder height. If it's too low there's loss of power and a lot of stress placed on the elbow (ulnar collateral) tendons. If the elbow is too high it pinches the rotator cuff and creates stress there as well.



9. Shoulders



The shoulders (head and eyes too) need to stay in line from 2nd towards home until foot plant.

A very typical flaw is the shoulder opening up too soon before foot plant causing erratic control (usually low and outside) and arm stress.

10. Lead foot plant and knee action

The lead foot should stride out to a long, but comfortable stride length. The foot should land on the ball of the inside part of the foot pointing slightly towards the right hand batters box. It should land on a line from the post (back foot) towards home plate. If it lands too far to the right the shoulders (for a righty) are too closed and they're throwing across the body which reduces velocity and puts a lot of stress on the shoulder.



If it lands too far to the left of the line, the shoulders will be pulled open too soon, reducing control, velocity and brings on a sore elbow. We have some excellent, easy drills (in our guides and our video library) on how to train the lead leg to land properly with the correct amount of front knee flex.

The front knee is important as well, it needs to have some flex at landing without caving in, and not too rigid which forces the upper body from being able to follow-through properly, forcing the pitching elbow to come from over the top which puts a lot of stress on the elbow, and usually pitches high in the strike (or ball) zone.

11. Back (post) foot action



Note: The back foot does NOT push off the mound. Even though that's how most people were taught in little league and you still hear coaches saying: "push off for power." Pushing off does just that, it pushes the upper body out too fast and now the entire sequence is called: "negative sequence," meaning the body is now, before it's even had a chance to get started is out of sequence (negative), and the body and muscle memory and mind will have to adjust (which usually doesn't happen) to get everything else back in sequence somewhere down the delivery road. The back foot is pulled off the rubber from the hip action. If the foot drags off the mound

12. Hip rotation



As the foot plants and the shoulders stayed closed, the hips explode the pitching arm through the pitching slot (angle) to release and pulling the back foot off the mound, actually rolling it onto its outside top of the toes and then the back foot pops up and out.

Even with the hips rotating and the release, the head, eyes, and shoulders should be as close to level as possible to keep good balance and allow a proper finish for the arm and put them into a good fielding position.

13. Release, follow-through, and finish

The release should be out in front of the head, and the wrist should snap through after release and follow a circular line from release down between the plant knee and ankle.

The pitcher should not short-arm the pitch or re-coil the arm like using a yo yo.

The finish allows the energy and stress in the shoulder, elbow and wrist to be dissipated instead of just jamming on the breaks. This proper follow-through and finish is vital to consistent pitching and for reducing arm



