

How to choose, teach and develop youth baseball pitchers

Early before the season starts, give all your players the opportunity to try out as a pitcher. For several days have each candidate throw 15 pitches. Keep records of balls and strikes thrown by each player. Choose your pitchers from among the leaders of these statistics.

In Little League you should pick from among your bigger players, two 12-year-olds, two 11-year-olds, and two 10-year-olds as potential pitchers. From these, concentrate on the best four; however, give all six enough work to hone their skills.

Narrow down your choice of two starters by comparing their statistics consisting of walks, hits, runs, strikeouts, fielding errors, knowledge of backing-up bases, etc., during the pre-season practice games. You should schedule as many of these games as possible. Work the three older ones until you make a decision as to your two starters.



Drills for pitchers

After you have chosen your six pitchers, continue to keep statistics so you can rank them for dependability and measure their progress. Start keeping a record of strike position, such as low strikes from the belt to the knees and high strikes from the belt to the arm pits.

Keep in mind the low pitch is more desirable because:

1. The low ball is harder to hit.
2. The low ball is most likely to result in a ground ball.

There is nothing more important in baseball, than sharpening the skills of your pitchers. Use the following drills to practice good pitching motion and rhythm:

1. Extend and raise the throwing arm. Have the player catch the ball and turn sideways. He then puts his throwing hand in the glove and grips the ball across the seam and moves the glove to his chest. As both hands reach the chest, he takes the ball out of his glove and raises and extends his throwing arm. Reach for the center-field flag and make the arm long before throwing the ball.
2. Step with the left foot. Instruct the pitcher to keep his left knee bent and land on the ball of his foot. Have him point the toes of his left foot toward the plate. After he learns to do this properly, draw a line in the dirt from the middle of the pitching rubber toward the plate. Have the pitcher place his right foot on the far right side of the pitching rubber with his left foot landing on the line pointing toward the target.
3. Push off the rubber. This movement involves rotating on the ball of the right foot and then pushing the weight forward with the toes.
4. Lean forward. Explain to your pitchers, they must lean forward to throw a low strike.

After teaching these basic movements, your pitchers should understand the important movements of delivery of the ball to the plate. Now, you can teach them the full sequence of the pitch from stance to fielding position.

Pitching Drills

One Knee Drill

Isolate the lower body to focus on developing proper arm action.

Pitchers pair up and kneel on their posting leg (right knee for right-handers, left knee for left handers).



Players get on one knee about 45 to 55 feet from each other. The pitcher with the ball will rotate his shoulder toward his throwing partner, bring his arm back with his hand on top of the baseball, use a good circular arm motion, and throw the ball, making sure the pitcher bends his elbow and finishes throwing elbow past the opposite knee.

Pause and Balance Drill

This is the single most effective drill to get a pitcher into a controlled and balanced balance position. This drill is particularly effective for pitchers who "rush" their motion, fall forward too soon, have trouble getting "on top" of the baseball into a high-¾ arm slot, or are imbalanced in the balance position.

To begin, a pitcher will go through his full wind-up without the baseball. When he gets to the balance position, the pitcher will stop, hold, turn his head and wait for the coach to hand him the baseball.

The coach should vary how quickly he hands his pitcher the ball from three- to five-seconds.

Once the pitcher has received the ball from his coach from the balance position, he will turn his head again and throw to his target emphasizing a good follow-through.

The Leverage Drill

"drop and drive" is not a correct pitching mechanic because your pitcher will lose out on the all-important attributes of pitching leverage by dropping (and thus lowering his release-point).

Drop and drive guys typically have flat fastballs. (Of course, there are always exceptions like Sandy Koufax and Tom Seaver, but typically, the hardest throwers all stay tall to take advantage of the leverage on their fastball.)

Here's a baseball pitching drill, called The Leverage Drill, that may be helpful:

Get your baseball pitcher into his balance position, have the pitcher post on a slightly bent back leg and have him bring his knee to the height you'd like to see it during his pitching delivery. Measure the height by placing your hand palm-facing down.

Next, without a baseball, have your baseball pitcher go through his pitching delivery (as a coach, you should stand to the side out, of your pitcher's way, but in a spot where you can easily put your hand out to the spot where you initially measured your pitcher's high-knee to be in the balance position).

Have your pitcher go through his pitching delivery and have the top of his knee touch the bottom of your extended hand. This will force your pitcher to stay tall on the back leg. If he collapses, your pitcher won't be able to bring his front knee to the same height that you had previously measured when he was in the balance position.

After a few sessions without a baseball, have your 10-year-old pitcher perform the drill throwing the baseball 35-feet, and then move the catcher back to 45-feet.

The Stride Drill

The Stride Drill is designed to train a pitcher's body to get into the proper throwing position enabling him to maximize velocity while minimizing the risk of injury during game situations. This drill can be performed without a baseball and can be done individually by a pitcher if a throwing partner is not available.

First, let's take a closer look at the stride phase of the pitching motion.

A pitcher's should stride at a minimum 80% his height towards home plate during his fastball delivery. On the curveball and change-up, his stride should be six to eight inches less than his height. For example, if a pitcher is 5 feet, 10 inches tall, then his stride toward home plate on the release of the baseball should be 5 feet, 2 inches (or thereabouts).

In the stride phase of the pitching motion, a pitcher should be able to draw an imaginary line from the heel of his back foot, through the ball of his stride foot, and onward to the target. Keeping the lower body aligned in a straight line closes a pitcher's hips, directs the shoulders, and allows the throwing arm to reach the "high cock phase" of its arm path in the back of the pitcher's body. Additionally, if a pitcher lands too far to the glove-side of his body, he will open the shoulder too soon. This causes the pitch to be low and outside while creating stress on the arm and reducing velocity. If a pitcher lands too far to the throwing-side, he will inevitably have to throw across his body making the outside part of the strike zone difficult to hit. Plus, if a pitcher throws across his body, he creates an increased amount of stress on the arm.

Let's begin. A pitcher will stand perpendicular to a straight line (like a foul line in the outfield grass or line on a gym floor). If the pitcher is on the pitching mound itself, he can use his spikes to drag out a straight line in the dirt 8-feet long and perpendicular to the rubber (i.e. directly in line with home plate). Then, he simply marks out the distance of his height and drags out a second line in the dirt-- only this one is parallel to the pitcher's rubber. If the pitcher is not on a mound, he will simply place a second object like his hat on the ground. This will mark the distance he should be striding toward his target.

Now, the "markings" he will have on the mound should create an imaginary letter "H" if one looks from the side. The pitcher then goes through his entire delivery (with or without throwing the baseball at the end of the motion) and looks to see where his front foot lands in relation to the two lines he has etched out in the dirt. He can use either his full or set wind-up in this drill. Did the pitcher land the length of his height? Did the pitcher stride in a straight line toward his target? If not, a pitcher should perform this drill 50-times a day without throwing the baseball.