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Essential Pitching Drills

Welcome to Essential Pitching Drills! In this book, we are going to look at how to build fundamentally sound pitching mechanics, as well as how to fix any existing mechanical flaws a pitcher might have in their throwing motion.

As every pitching coach will tell you, good mechanics are the first step in a long journey to developing a pitcher into the best that they can be. And while every player will have their own unique throwing motion, there are certain hallmarks of success that all sound pitchers subscribe too.

Keep in mind that a pitcher shouldn’t be trying to work on command and control at the same time as they work on their mechanics. It’s extremely difficult to focus in on mechanics and also try and have good control or command. Most of these drills will focus in on the mechanics, with many of them eliminating the baseball entirely from the equation to allow the pitcher to devote all of their attention to executing the fundamentals correctly.

One of the other added benefits of developing sound pitching mechanics is reducing the amount of stress on the joints and as a result also reducing the risk of injury. Health is should always be on the mind of the pitcher, and being mindful of pitch counts – in practice in games, is always good practice. It will not only keep your bullpen healthier, but you’ll get a chance to develop the bullpen further, and your pitchers will also be stronger at the end of the season.

Each drill is marked with one of a degree of difficulty, then explained with step by step instructions and several images to use as reference. You'll learn what each drill is trying to improve, how to set up and execute them, as well as some specific coaching tips to help get the most out of the drill, and your players.

Now let's get started!
Glide Drill

**Difficulty Level:** Easy

**Setup:** The pitcher will need his glove and a ball, as well as a small block.

**Purpose:** The focus of this drill is to encourage the pitcher to straighten out his leg early, keeping the body loaded and powerful, forcing him to keep the front side in and accelerate in a linear fashion towards the plate.

**Execution:** Place the block just in front of and to the side of the rubber.

Now your pitcher will go up into the stretch position, and as he separates his hands and begins his stride, will bring his foot down to touch the block and then glide forward towards the plate with that same lead foot – all as fluidly as possible.

Make sure the block is small enough that the pitcher needs to fully extend their leg to get down to it, or they won’t be getting the full benefit of this drill.

**Coaching Tips:** Make sure the pitcher avoids separating this into two separate, robotic movements. Encourage them to do their best to make it one smooth, fluid movement.

This is because when the pitcher waits too long to straighten out his leg, beginning his rotation with a leg still bent at that 90 degree angle, they’ll end up spinning off balance, shortening their stride and moving their release point back.
‘L’ Drill

**Difficulty Level:** Easy

**Setup:** The pitcher will need his glove and a ball, as well as a partner if possible.

**Purpose:** To teach the fundamentals of throwing a sound pitch.

**Execution:** Have the pitcher stand with his shoulders square to his target. From here they’ll go through four stages, showing them step by step how to develop a proper throwing motion.

1. First have them stand with their feet shoulder width apart with their hand in their glove.
2. Next step is to separate the hands, making sure to point both thumbs down at the ground.
3. Next they move their throwing arm out to a horizontal position, and from there we bend at the elbow bringing the ball vertical to bring it to an ‘L’ position.
4. From there, flip the ball, and as you extend and finish the pitch, tuck your glove hand in.

Once you can see the arm action smoothing out, go ahead and have them make the motion more fluid, combining the steps into one motion.

The second part of this drill is very similar, with one small adjustment. Instead of squaring up to throw, they should start off sideways from their target.

When throwing sideways they’ll need to incorporate the back leg into the throw, and do something called rolling the laces – rotating the back leg so that the heel comes up into the air and the weight is transferred to the balls of the foot.

They should also adjust their front foot slightly so that their feet are aligned how they would be when they pitch, with

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their front toe aligned roughly with the instep of their back foot. We also want to encourage them to work their glove hand a little more as they finish their pitch, coordinating this with their back foot.

**Coaching Tips:** Some pitchers, power pitchers especially, like to extend and bring the elbow behind their back for extra torque. While this can help get some extra heat on the ball, I try to discourage it, as bringing the elbows too far back can create extra, unnecessary rotation, as well as putting stress on the anterior shoulder.
Protector Screen Drill (Front)

**Difficulty Level:** Easy

**Setup:** The pitcher will need their glove and a ball, and you’ll also need to set up a protector screen. A protector screen is a larger screen or net, roughly 8 feet tall and about the same length wise, and is a great tool for developing any pitcher. However, in this drill or any drill where a protector screen is required, you can simply as the coach stand in the position the screen would be in and have a very similar affect.

**Purpose:** To eliminate any excessive movement in the throwing arm and the legs in front of the pitcher, and to force the pitcher to align their stride properly.

**Execution:** With the pitcher up on the rubber, set up the screen roughly 6-12 inches from the pitchers toes. From here the drill is fairly simple, and versatile. The pitcher can work from whatever position they choose; whether that’s the balance, stretch or even the windup – the focus of the drill is just getting reps in, focusing on eliminating any contact with the screen.

**Coaching Tips:** This drill can help fix any number of errors, but is especially effective at helping pitchers who pitch too close in, or those whose pitches drops down out wide. This can also be a great drill for pitchers that struggle staying vertical on the breaking ball, or even for those that put too much weight on their back heel, resulting in a front leg that kicks up into the air. The emphasis is on efficiency of locomotion – remind them to focus on moving up and forward.
Protector Screen Drill (Back)

**Difficulty Level:** Easy

**Setup:** The pitcher will need their glove and a ball, and you’ll also need to set up a protector screen.

**Purpose:** To eliminate any excessive movement in the throwing arm and the legs on the backside of the pitcher, and to force the pitcher to align their stride properly.

**Execution:** Set the pitcher up on the rubber again, this time though set up the screen roughly 6-12 inches from the pitchers heels.

The execution of this drill is almost the exact same as when the screen is in front, with the only difference being the screen is in the back, and the different mechanical errors this will force the pitcher to correct. From here the drill is fairly simple, and versatile.

The pitcher can work from whatever position they choose; whether that’s the balance, stretch or even the windup – the focus of the drill is just getting reps in, focusing on eliminating any contact with the screen.

**Coaching Tips:** When the screen is placed here it’s great for fixing any of the following errors that result in excessive movement behind the pitcher’s back.

A couple of examples include:

1. A pitcher who opens up too far in the stride, causing him to lose balance and lean back
2. A pitcher who hooks his arm behind him, as opposed to taking it thumb to thigh and straight back to second
3. A pitcher with a wild lead arm action at the beginning or end of his pitch.

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Protector Screen Drill (Behind)

**Difficulty Level:** Easy

**Setup:** The pitcher will need their glove and a ball, and you’ll also need to set up a protector screen.

**Purpose:** To eliminate any excessive movement in the throwing arm directly behind the pitcher, and to teach the pitcher not to leave the rubber too early.

**Execution:** The placement of this screen will vary a fair bit depending on the body type and mechanics of the pitcher, so use your judgment – you don’t want it so close that it really restricts the takeaway, but you don’t want it so far that they can straighten the arm out completely.

Once in position, the pitcher will go through their throwing motion. The idea is to separate from the glove hand and wait until brushing the throwing arm up against the net to begin that movement forward, toward the plate and off the rubber.

**Coaching Tips:** This iteration of the protector screen drill is great for reminding a player not to drift to the plate too early, as well as to teach them not to stiff arm their throwing arm as they bring it up.

Once that throwing arm has left the thumb to thigh position with their hand to the sky, we don’t want our pitcher to straighten their back arm out completely; we actually want them to lift with their elbow for the most part until they get to about shoulder height, and from there go to that ‘L’ position.

If their arm is too straight it can be very tough to get to the necessary height on the takeaway.
Uphill Drill

**Difficulty Level:** Intermediate

**Setup:** The pitcher will stand just behind the mound with a glove and ball.

**Purpose:** To help pitchers develop good arm extension to allow the creation of a downhill plane on their pitches.

**Execution:** Once in position behind the mound, the pitcher will go throw their throwing motion. The idea is to separate from the glove hand and wait until brushing the throwing arm up against the net to begin that movement forward, up the incline of the mound, toward the plate and off the rubber.

The distance that you want the pitcher to setup at is dependent on the age group you’re working with and the rules in your particular area, and maybe even the shape of your mound.

The most important thing is that the pitcher is throwing the pitch uphill, and that your pitchers always throw from the same distance when doing this drill, to give them a sense of continuity.

Also, make sure however far back the pitcher moves, the catcher moves the equivalent forward, so that they aren’t throwing any longer than they need to.

**Coaching Tips:** It’s extremely important to remember that when you’re working on mechanics, you can’t work on command at the same time.

So focus on developing good mechanics for the first half of their workout in the bullpen, and then move them up onto the mound and allow them to focus on command after.

Also, this isn’t exclusively a fastball drill – make sure to work everything; changeups, breaking balls, because regardless of the pitch, you want to make sure it is being thrown on that
downhill plane.

The pitchers that are going to get the most out of this drill are the low elbow pitchers, pitchers with a tendency to spin out or recoil, and the pitcher who doesn’t extend his head after their hand.

Another great effect of this drill is that it forces the pitcher into a real firm stride and plant, because if that front foot isn’t set the pitcher will spin off, recoiling to the side.
Fungo Bat Drill

**Difficulty Level:** Intermediate

**Setup:** The pitcher will need their glove and a ball, a pitcher’s mound, a partner and a catcher if possible as well. You’ll also need a Fungo bat, although you could use a regular bat as well – the only problem being that you’re going to be holding it out and extended for a long period of time and a heavier bat will begin to wear out the arm much quicker.

**Purpose:** To help pitchers develop good arm extension to allow the creation of a downhill plane on their pitches.

**Execution:** The idea here is to hold the bat out in front of the pitcher and have them imagine reaching out to touch it on their follow through.

To do this properly, you’re going to want to stand far enough out in front of the pitcher - who’s standing on the rubber - that they have complete confidence they can throw over the bat, but close enough that it forces them to throw on a downhill plane as they reach out.

**SAFETY NOTE:** *we don’t actually want the pitcher to be able to touch the bat – you should be somewhere around six feet in front of them, roughly.*

**Coaching Tips:** This is a great drill for the pitcher who tends to be underneath the ball, like a pie thrower or a waiter carrying a tray.

The bat out in front forces the elbow up, and encourages good extension.
Finishing the Pitch Drill

**Difficulty Level:** Intermediate

**Setup:** The pitcher will need their glove, a quarter inch rope roughly 12 inches long with a knot in both ends, a "ground ball paddle" or boxing glove to protect the hand, a foam pad to protect the forearm, a metal chair, and a partner.

**Purpose:** To teach pitchers extension and to finish pitches aggressively and to move the release point closer to the plate.

**Execution:** The pitcher will step up onto the rubber, going into the stretch holding one end of the rope inside their glove instead of a baseball. Their partner will stand in front of them, far enough to force the pitcher to extend, holding their arm out with the paddle and the pad to protect themselves.

The chair will be just outside and behind where the pitchers stride would land, far enough to not obstruct the pitcher’s throwing motion, but close enough that on the follow through the rope smacks the top rung of the chair.

From there, the pitcher will go through their throwing motion, extending out to get the rope to hit the paddle first, and follow through strong, hitting the chair with the rope right after.

**Coaching Tips:** You really want to emphasize your pitcher getting their throwing arm past their stride leg knee. This is a great finishing point for the pitch, and will ensure strong, loud, contact with the rope on the chair.
Dowel Drill

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Setup: Your pitcher will need a glove, a mound, and a dowel. To give it the same feeling as a baseball for this drill you’ll want to tape it up to give it some extra grip and so that it has a nice ergonomic feel in the hand.

Purpose: To encourage good arm speed out in front at the point of release.

Execution: The drill is fairly simple to execute, the pitcher will simply hold the dowel like a ball, with the wand protruding through their fingers, the only difference being they won’t throw it towards home plate.

The part they need to focus on is listening, to hear when the wand whips through the air. If they hear the sound behind them or up around the head, they’re wasting all of their hand speed too early in the throwing motion.

They want to focus on making sure they hear the whip of the wand out in front, where they would be releasing a pitch normally.

Coaching Tips: This is a great drill for the pitcher who tends to cut off the pitch, or who is emphasizing the hand speed too early in the pitch, wasting it all behind his head.
Dry Run Drill

**Difficulty Level:** Easy

**Setup:** The pitcher will need their glove, and if you’ve got a large mirror that the pitcher can use to examine themselves as they pitch, even better, but it’s not necessary.

**Purpose:** To work on the sequence of their pitches; the separation of the hands, firing the back side and striding at the right times, their pickoff moves – anything they want to break down and focus on getting all of the small steps right.

**Execution:** This drill is very easy, and is more work mentally than physically. Set up on the pitcher’s mound with the mirror in a position that you can see your whole throwing motion.

The idea is to go through any number of things, just focusing on getting the feeling and the timing of all the different steps that make a great pitch – without throwing a ball. Since you don’t need to worry about where the ball is going to go, you can focus all of your energy on perfecting your mechanics.

This is why the mirror is so great, because while you can feel most of the errors you make on your own, having an extra pair of eyes (that are still your own!) can be extremely beneficial in rooting out bad habits.

**Coaching Tips:** One of the great benefits of this drill is the fact that there is very little stress put on your arm, so it’s something you can do fairly often, and for a pretty long time.

You’ll want to make sure your pitchers change it up, working on anything they would do on the mound, from pitching to pick offs.
Basic Seven Drill

**Difficulty Level:** Intermediate

**Setup:** The pitcher will need their glove, a ball, and a partner. You want to do this drill on flat ground, with your partner 30-40 feet away.

**Purpose:** To teach the seven important elements of a good delivery.

**Execution:** Perform each drill one at a time, mastering each step before you proceed to the next. The focus here is on improving mechanics, so don’t worry about going full speed.

The first step is working on the balance position. Have your pitcher just strike the balance position, and evaluate their position to make sure that it is sound. Make sure that the knee isn’t too open, that they’re comfortably balanced over their pivot foot, and not back on their heels or arcing their back. Once they’ve established a good position, have them now work on striking the balance position with their eyes closed, to further test their balance.

The next step is working on separating the hands from the balance position. Have your pitcher separate and conjoin their hands repeatedly, all while maintaining their balance, not drifting towards the plate before the separation has happened.

The third stage is working on the separation out of the windup. One of the triggers for the pitcher to begin gliding to the plate is the separation of the hands. By this I mean that once they’ve separated their hands, they know that they can begin to glide towards the plate. So the emphasis of this step is doing just that – separating the hands before beginning the glide to home plate.

Have them start from the windup, going through their
throwing motion and then stopping in the power position.

Once stopped, make sure to examine their power position. Some of the common mistakes include pitchers closing their lead foot off at too sharp an angle, and leading with the head. Make sure the head isn’t leaning over to the front or back, and the pitcher is well balanced.

The second trigger, and the next step, is the leg lift. So for this part of the drill, the pitcher is going to focus on waiting until the leg gets to the top of its lift – then beginning his glide to power position.

The fifth step is synchronizing the separation and the leg lift. From the windup, we call this lift and separate. The pitcher is going to shadow the complete pitching motion here, emphasizing in his head that when the leg is at the top of its lift, and his hand is starting to reach back, he can begin the glide to the plate.

Working from the stretch is different however. Instead of lift and separate, it’s separate and lift. Make sure your pitcher synchronizes the bottom half with the top half so that they don’t end up with their arm late.

The next element of our delivery that we’re going to work on is rolling the laces. To do this, we have our pitcher throw a fastball, in that mid-thigh to knee area, and evaluate. This is a technique where more is less – we don’t want them to roll the heel all the way open, or we’ll open up the front side.

And in the seventh and last step of our basic seven we work on pitching to locations. Now most of the time when pitchers are looking to locate pitches, they look to throw inside and outside. Instead, tell your pitchers to throw near eye and far eye.

When the pitcher is throwing to their arm side they throw to their near-eye, and when they’re throwing away from their arm side, they’re throwing to their far eye. Throwing in or

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away is a change in release point and using the near eye far eye technique can help illustrate this.

**Coaching Tips:** Make sure your pitchers do about 50% of their work from the stretch – while you will throw fewer pitches from the stretch than the windup in most ball games, the biggest pitches are going to be made out of the stretch.

Also, if your pitchers are having trouble with their arm being late when throwing from the stretch tell them to try and throw before front foot contact and on a downhill plane – now they aren’t actually going to do that, but it’s an overteaching technique, to give them an idea of how early they need to work on getting their arm up and moving forward.

When working on the lift, tell them to put their brain in their legs – put all their focus on the leg lift, and when it gets to the top move to power.

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