



## One-Knee Drill

### Objective

To introduce players to proper throwing mechanics, particularly arm action (getting the ball down, out, and up)

### Setup

Two players (or a player and a coach) and a baseball

### Execution

This drill breaks down the player's arm action and works on keeping the elbow at the proper level. Players drop their throwing-side knee to the ground with the opposite knee up and play catch at a short distance using a four-seam grip to throw. Concentrate on taking the ball down, out, and up from the glove and keeping the elbow above the shoulder. The hand is on top of the ball as it's taken out of the glove, shifting to behind the ball as the arm comes forward. Players don't throw hard. Have them check their grip, hand, and elbow position after bringing the ball down out and up. Hand should be on top of the ball with fingers pointing away from the target just before the arm comes forward. From there, the player points the front shoulder toward the target, rotates the hips, brings the arm forward, and releases the ball, keeping the elbow above the shoulder. Younger players can use soft baseballs or do this drill with their coaches.



(continued)

Adapted, by permission, from Ripken, 2007, *Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).



## **One-Knee Drill** *(continued)*



### **Coaching Keys**

Many young players turn their hand so that it's under the ball before they bring the arm forward. Some people call this "pie throwing." Think of how you have to hold a pie to throw it at someone; the palm is facing up so that you don't drop the pie. This is the opposite of how you should throw a baseball. For players who do this, have them stop their motion just before they bring the arm forward and check to see that the hand is on top of the ball and that the ball is pointing straight back. Other players will let their elbows drop below shoulder level at the release point. To fix this problem, try the Tee Drill.



## Tee Drill

### Objective

To help players learn to keep the elbow above the shoulder when throwing

### Setup

Two players (or a player and a coach), batting tee, a baseball

### Execution

This drill helps prevent players from dropping their elbow when throwing. Players assume a one-knee position, as described in the One-Knee Drill. A batting tee is placed on the throwing side, close enough so that if the elbow drops it hits the tee. Players take the ball down, out, and up—checking their grip as necessary before rotating forward and releasing the ball. The presence of the tee will force players to consciously think about not dropping the elbow below shoulder level. Over time this will develop muscle memory that leads to proper throwing mechanics.

### Make It Fun

Find a target and throw at it, awarding points only if the elbow is above the shoulder and the target is hit by the throw.





## Long Toss

### **Objective**

To develop arm strength and lengthen the throwing motion

### **Setup**

Two players and a baseball

### **Execution**

This drill helps improve any player's arm strength and is not just for pitchers. Warm up playing catch. Once the arm is warm, move back a few steps with each throw. Get far enough apart that it's a challenge to get the ball to the partner. Take a long step forward, concentrate on keeping the elbow way above the shoulder, and throw the ball with a slight arc. Shoulders should remain on about the same plane throughout the delivery; we're not trying to throw pop-ups. It's okay if the ball arrives on one hop. Throw until arms start to fatigue, then move closer to finish up. Pitchers should do this drill between starts. Younger players shouldn't try the drill more than once a week. Older position players can do it several times a week.



## Power Position Drill

### Objective

To develop a proper grip and arm action

### Setup

Two players (or a player and a coach), baseballs, a pitching mound (optional).

### Execution

Variations of this drill can be done at all levels. The drill can be simplified for the youngest age groups to stress which direction to face when throwing; the proper four-seam grip; getting the ball down, out, and up; keeping the hand above the ball prior to rotation; keeping the elbow above the shoulder; pointing the front shoulder toward the target; stepping toward the target; and following through. For older and more advanced players, the drill can help troubleshoot mechanical problems often experienced by pitchers. Players create a wide base with their feet and hold the ball with a four-seam grip. Weight shifts to the backside before moving forward. Hands break, and the weight goes back. Power position is assumed (check as necessary): hand above the ball with fingers pointed away from the target. Weight is back; elbow is above the shoulder. Front shoulder points toward the target. Hand shifts from above the ball to behind the ball as the arm moves forward through rotation. Ball is released (does not have to be thrown hard). Follow-through takes place with the trail foot staying in contact with the rubber. Players rotate on the back foot so the hips turn. Front toe points forward.

### Troubleshooting

The Power Position Drill can be used to troubleshoot the following mechanical flaws:

**Short-arming.** Start in the finish position with the throwing arm extended forward as if following through. Take weight all the way back through the power position before finishing to stretch out the throwing motion.

**Getting pitches up.** Have the catcher shorten up with the pitcher throwing from a mound. To throw downhill from the power position, the pitcher must get the elbow up and stay on top of the ball.

**Long-striders.** Again, have the catcher shorten up with the pitcher throwing from a mound. If the stride is too long the pitcher won't be able to compensate to get downhill in time to throw a strike.

**Breaking balls or off-speed pitches.** Between starts, pitchers struggling with their grips, mechanics, or control can practice their breaking balls and off-speed pitches from the power position on or off a mound from a shortened distance to get a better feel and make corrections.

### Make It Fun

Throw at a fence or screen with a target from the power position, awarding points for executing the drill properly and hitting the target.

(continued)



## Power Position Drill *(continued)*





## Balance Position Drill

### Objective

To help players understand how to gather energy at balance position before exploding toward the plate

### Setup

Pitcher, catcher, pitching mound (optional), a baseball

### Execution

Pitcher throws from a mound to a catcher at a shortened distance. Start motion from the stretch, lifting the leg and pausing for a 3-count (one, one thousand; two, one thousand; three, one thousand) at balance position (upper and lower body come together, leg slightly closed with butt cheek pointing toward catcher, glove slightly above knee, upper body not leaning back). On the count of 3, pitcher strides forward and releases the ball. This drill makes pitchers gather their energy at the balance position so that the body and arm can come forward together toward home plate.

### Make It Fun

Throw at a fence or screen with a target while executing the balance position drill. Award points for executing the drill properly and hitting the target. You can split the target in half and ask the pitcher to throw inside or outside, awarding points only for pitches that are in the correct location (or more points for hitting the exact location).





## **Toe Tap Drill (1-2-3 Drill)**

### **Objective**

To develop an understanding of the importance of staying back, using a soft landing, and not rushing the delivery

### **Setup**

Pitcher, catcher, pitching mound (optional), a baseball

### **Execution**

Pitcher throws from a mound (or not) to a catcher at a shortened distance. Lifts leg and puts it down (counts 1), lifts leg and puts it down again (counts 2), lifts leg and throws on a count of 3. This drill teaches balance and coordination and builds strength in the back leg. The pitcher stays under control and avoids landing too hard, which can make throwing strikes difficult. Shoulders should stay fairly level without changing planes abruptly when the foot finally lands.

### **Make It Fun**

Throw at a fence or screen with a target while executing the balance position drill. Award points for executing the drill properly and hitting the target. You can split the target in half and ask pitcher to throw inside or outside, awarding points only for pitches that are in the correct location (or more points for hitting the exact location).



## Pitching

### **F i v e   L i n k s   o f   t h e   C h a i n f o r   P i t c h e r s**

1. Feet: start the motion with a small step back.
2. Balance position: lift the leg so that the weight is centered over the support leg.
3. Power position: keep weight back, hand above the ball, front shoulder toward the target.
4. Rotation: hand shifts to position behind the ball, elbow above shoulder, front side pulls down, back foot remains in contact with rubber.
5. Follow-through: takes care of itself if all other links are in place; ideally pitcher should be in an athletic position to field batted balls.