

Rotator Cuff Strengthening Program

By Tim Bishop MS, CSCS

When the winter holidays approach, it is the time to take a serious look at your baseball training program for the upcoming spring season. One body part that is especially important to focus on, not only for pitchers but also for position players, is the rotator cuff. The rotator cuff is made up of four very small muscles that assist in keeping the shoulder joint stable and therefore help protect it from injury. Most players want to get bigger and stronger in the major muscle groups, but without strength and endurance in the rotator cuff you will not be able to perform at your highest level over an extended period of time.

The following routine is designed to be done using resistive tubing. This program is ideal to be used in conjunction with a leg strengthening program for pitchers. Resistive tubing is available in most sporting good stores. There are many different exercises that can be done for the cuff area. Light dumbbells or cuff weights can be used as well. This is a basic beginner program. As with any resistance program, you are better off learning proper technique to begin with. The amount of weight or resistance used is not nearly as important as the technique – especially when it comes to the rotator cuff.

Begin with medium to light resistive tubing and perform one to two sets of 12 repetitions. Do this program 3-4 times per week with one day of rest in between each session. You can do one light set prior to throwing as a means of warming up the shoulder in addition to your other general body warm-up exercises.

The first three exercises should be done in the same starting position. Stand on the middle of your resistive tubing with both feet and holding one end of your tubing in each hand. Bend your knees slightly and keep your back straight. The length of your tubing will depend on your height. An average length is about five feet.

Basic Rotator Cuff Strengthening Program

With your palms facing back behind you, slowly raise your arms to shoulder height directly out in front of you. Pause for one second and then slowly lower your arms. You should count, “1, 2” on the way up and, “1, 2, 3, 4” on the way down.

Next, with your palms facing in toward your sides, raise your arms straight out to the side and stop at shoulder height. Return in the same fashion as the previous exercise.

The next exercise begins with your palms facing in once again. Raise your arms out in front of you, but at a 45 degree angle (1/2 way between straight out in front and straight out to the side) and with your thumbs pointing straight up toward the ceiling. Stop at shoulder height. Return in the same manner as before.

The last exercise is performed with one arm at a time. Secure the tubing to a surface that is just above waist level. A basement pole or door knob will work. For the right arm, stand with your left shoulder toward the attachment end of the tubing. Grasp the tubing in your right hand with your elbow at 90 degrees and your forearm across your abdominal area. Slowly externally rotate your shoulder (pull out and away while keeping your elbow close to your body) as far as you comfortably can. Slowly return to the starting position. Repeat with the opposite arm in order to keep a balance in strength.

When completing this exercise routine remember to go slow and use proper technique. More is definitely not better when it comes to training the rotator cuff area.

Tim Bishop M.S., C.S.C.S. served as the strength and conditioning coach for the Baltimore Orioles for 14 years. He has opened his own training facility, PerformFit Sports Performance Fitness Training, in Timonium, MD. For more information about Tim's programs for kids and adults, please go to www.performfit.com.