

Introduction to Phase THREE

Phase THREE – AutoPilot: At this point, a pitcher has performed his pitching delivery enough times (often after years of repetition) that he is now operating with little to no thought to the “mechanics” of executing a pitch. A pitcher in Phase TWO operates in this way often, but is more erratic. A pitcher truly in Phase THREE is now able to execute pitches with a fair amount of accuracy and consistency as though it was second nature.

A pitcher in Phase THREE can throw strikes while distracted... He might be able to carry on a conversation with you while pitching, thinking about something totally unrelated to pitching, and still hit his spots. This, ultimately, is where you want to be.

Now perhaps the above isn't the greatest example, because even if you don't want to overthink your mechanics, you DO want to give each pitch your full concentration – know your goal, have a purpose with each pitch. But, the big differentiator here is that the physical side of things has become ingrained... The pitcher has developed his motion through countless repetitions, hours of practice working on executing pitches and hitting his target. He can now do it without even thinking about it. If adjustments need to be made, they're made naturally and easily.

Normally, this is a good thing... That is, IF the pitcher has imbedded good movement patterns. The downside of Phase THREE – and this is common – is that a pitcher may have developed inefficiencies and bad habits... or he may have been taught “pitching mechanics” in a way that created a lack of momentum and power in his delivery.

This is where the use of video is key in this phase: to assess a pitcher's delivery and recognize if there are any inefficiencies or areas that could be enhanced. Then, after working on any adjustments, to review and check his progress.

When inefficiencies or glaring mechanical issues are identified here, the pitcher basically has two options:

1. Go back to Phase ONE... get back to the early motor learning level and essentially “reprogram” key movements in his delivery (last resort - not always practical)
2. If the issue has more to do with a lack of tempo and lower half power, the pitcher can often improve his delivery by focusing on the “influencers” or by effectively applying “peer pressure” (I believe Lantz Wheeler is the first person I heard use that term in reference to pitching mechanics – credit where it’s due).

Here’s why Option #2 is usually better at this point...

You’ll have a tough time changing a pitcher’s throwing pattern in this stage... However, things like Early Momentum, Leading with the Hips and Engaging the Back Leg are things that can all be worked on without having to completely rip his delivery apart and start from scratch.

By engaging the lower half and moving more powerfully down the mound, other mechanical “timing” issues will often take care of themselves. And, because these things don’t consciously involve focusing on the throwing arm, a pitcher can work on these things actively without affecting his command and control a whole lot.

Basically, he’s moving back into Phase TWO for a bit... at least part-time. He’ll have to be more aware of his movements, consciously making the changes and adaptations... repeating and practicing them enough so that they become ingrained. It takes work and focus - especially in the early goings. And video should be checked periodically to make sure he’s making the adjustments.

If, after working this way, adjustments still aren’t transferring to the mound, there’s a good chance he may need to go back to Phase ONE to work on reprogramming these movements – best reserved for the off-season or a period of time where the pitcher won’t have the added elements of competition and the demands of hitting spots under pressure (in which case, he’ll likely just revert back to old movement patterns and what his body has always trusted and relied upon in those situations).

Dry work, mirror work and video review are all useful tools here. So in the videos in this section, we’ll look at some of the ways you can use these tools to address inefficiencies and enhance power in your delivery for pitchers in this phase.