

## CHAPTER 2

# *Fundamentals of Proper Pitching Mechanics*

This chapter covers the entire pitching motion from start to finish, describing the physical actions as well as providing the keys for teaching young athletes how to learn these movements. Very early in his development, a beginning pitcher cannot, and does not need to, comprehend the complex ways the body moves while throwing a baseball. Instead, the athlete needs to process easily understood requests and thoughts to move into the desired position or to perform the required action. For example, for a specific finishing position, the pitcher's hips must rotate and his legs must work through the release of the baseball. However, it is much easier for a young pitcher to be aware of the position of his body after releasing the ball, than it is for him to consciously work on a good hip and trunk turn late in his delivery.

## COACHING THE BEGINNING PITCHER

In this book, the pitching motion is broken up into six different positions:

1. The wind-up stance
2. The balance point
3. Breaking from the balance point
4. Landing
5. The release point
6. The finish

Each position is described in a section below. The first part of each section contains a detailed description of the action required of the pitcher in the position. These details are designed to help the coach thoroughly understand how the entire body works together to gather energy and impart maximum force through the baseball. However, the information must be taught to young pitchers in a much simpler format. Therefore, this detailed account is followed by a “How to Teach” area, with the information broken into a small number of teachable and understandable parts. Keys for teaching that specific portion of the pitching motion are provided. Chapter 3 provides an outline to follow when teaching a pitcher for the first time.

This chapter takes a reader through the entire pitching motion and therefore covers the full wind-up mechanics. Beginning pitchers, however, should use the simplicity of the stretch position as a starting point. It is much easier to learn pitching

from the stretch, understand the importance of strength, balance and control, and then work up to the full wind-up.

## **WIND-UP STANCE (to balance point)**

The wind-up stance (set position) should be comfortable and athletic. A pitcher's weight should be balanced, with his feet roughly shoulder width apart. The coach's verbal cue for this is, "Under the armpits." The toes touch the dirt in front of the rubber, positioned on the far right side of the rubber. The hands are held together, comfortably, in front of chest, with the back of the glove facing the batter and fingers pointing to the sky. The throwing hand rests within the glove holding the baseball with the fingers on top and a neutral grip (enabling the pitcher to easily move to fastball and change-up grips). This hand position prevents the opposition from guessing which pitch is being thrown. The pitcher's eyes are focused intently on home plate and the target that the catcher is giving.

### **Position and Action of the Pitcher**

- The left leg takes a baby-step back, at an angle. This step is short to maintain balance, and the foot makes a 45-degree angle with the left toes

## COACHING THE BEGINNING PITCHER

pointing at the right leg. The upper body remains “quiet” and there is limited movement (no swaying back or side to side).

- Lift and pivot: the plant foot (right foot) lifts and pivots, moving parallel to the inside of the rubber. It’s important to move slowly and under control, and this movement becomes more comfortable with practice. The foot is lifted into position to avoid a slide.
- Leg lift: the left leg rises, with the lift foot (left foot) underneath the knee and the toe pointing down! (This foot is also called the “dead foot” when the foot is relaxed and the toe points toward the ground). Doing this keeps the body upright and the head square and helps avoid leaning back. Keeping the toe down also ensures that the lead leg lands on the ball of the foot, not on the heel.
- The hands move back to the body. Some pitchers choose to move their hands over their head when they take their baby-step back. Whether or not a pitcher does this, his hands must be in front of the chest at the peak of the leg lift. This is the balance point, and if the hands have moved, they must be returned at this time!

## How To Teach the Wind-Up Stance

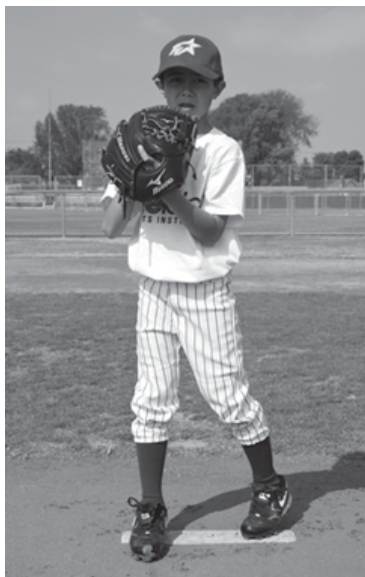
1. *Begin by describing the physical position before movement.* Start by describing the actual wind-up stance position, covering first the pitcher's feet (shoulder width apart and balanced) and working all the way up to the head and eyes (on the target). The coach's verbal checklist for this stance is, "Feet, hands, eyes." Remember to teach that the glove is placed in front of the chest with the back of the glove facing the batter to avoid showing the batter, or either of the base coaches, any clue about what pitch is coming. Advanced pitchers should use a neutral grip so they can get to any pitch without a noticeable or recognizable movement of the wrist or hand. A neutral grip is somewhere in between the two-seam, four-seam, and off-speed grips, with the fingers on top of the ball.



*The Wind-Up Stance Position*

2. *Teach a short baby-step back.* The easiest way to

teach the step back is to instruct pitchers to point their stepping toe at their plant foot. The purpose of the step back is not to gear up and gain momentum. Instead, it is designed to give the pitcher a chance to free his opposite foot for planting. So, keep the step back short! Additionally, avoid any swaying or an excessive shift in weight backward, which can cause the pitcher to



*Baby Step Back with the Left Foot*

rush back through the balance point and into release. Instruct the pitcher to keep his head over or in front of the rubber during the step back to keep any weight from swaying behind the rubber. The pitcher should be instructed to keep his upper body “quiet,” with little or no movement through the balance point.

3. *Don't let the pitcher rush the rotation of the plant foot.* Instruct pitchers to be patient and not rush their foot placement as they are learning the wind-up. It is more important to train the body to be