



# Coaching Fastpitch Pitchers

"Pitching is the key ingredient in fastpitch softball. In no other team sport can a single player make such a significant contribution to the level of play and the outcome of a game as the fastpitch pitcher."

- Fastpitch Softball

*By Tanya Harding*

# Objectives

- To have a basic knowledge of the fundamentals/technique of softball pitching.
- Prescribe appropriate drills according to ability.
- Identify incorrect techniques.
- Injury prevention – core stability, strength, flexibility.
- Mental Game – Routines, positive self-talk/affirmations, imagery & relaxation.



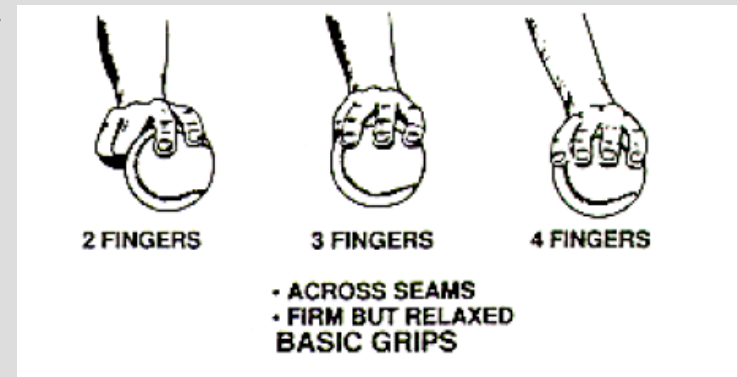
# Fundamentals/Technique

- Good fundamentals/technique is an absolute requirement in building a strong, consistent pitcher.
- Prevents long term injuries related specifically to the softball pitch.
- Once good fundamentals have been established, developing movement pitches is an easier progression



# Fundamentals/Technique

- Grip – 2 or 3 fingers over the top of the seam
- Correct arm circle – fingers facing up & in towards the body.
- Body rotation – shoulders, hip, knee and drive foot all rotate and should align.
- Stride – on centre line
- Release – elbow close to the body, strong wrist snap (fingers cocked backed allowing for wrist snap)



# Drills Introduction

*Whilst practicing all of the drills outlined in the following slides it is important to remember the following;*

- Core stability – keep abdominals & glutes contracting to ensure pelvic stability.
- Balance – Your feet & legs are your base, keeping these strong and weight distributed evenly will give you greater support and stability throughout the pitch.
- Posture – stay tall throughout the pitch, shoulders strong & tall, head/eye's focused directly on the target.
- The aim of all of these drills is to break the pitch down and work on specific areas.

# Wrist Snap Drills



- DRILL 1 - Take a ball in your hand and try spinning it backwards to yourself.
- DRILL 2 - Facing your partner, keep your feet firmly planted and try snapping the ball to your partner.
- DRILL 3 - Starting with your arm in a half circle position, then try catching your wrist with the opposite hand and snapping the ball to your catcher. As you get more comfortable with this action try doing it a little faster building up the speed of your wrist snap.

# Wrist Snap Drills, cont.



- DRILL 4 – Starting with your arm in the half circle position, try pitching the ball to your partner, focusing on snapping your wrist on release.
- DRILL 5 – If you are comfortable with this drill than try the same drill, but snapping your wrist to a specific target (have the catcher set up inside & outside)
- DRILL 6 – Both these above drills can be done with a full arm circle.

*NB. Note that no legs are used in these drills as the main focus is on developing a strong wrist snap/fast ball spin and control of release.*

# Leg Drive/Power Drills

- DRILL 4 – this drill can be performed to develop both wrist snap & leg drive. As a variation to work on leg drive, lift the front leg and practice driving forward off the plate & then snapping your wrist on release.
- DRILL 5 – Can be performed using the same variation as above. Now you are working to a set target so the level of difficulty increases.
- DRILL 6 – with leg variation is beginning to incorporate the whole pitch, working specifically on the release phase of the pitch.



# Leg Drive/Power Drills cont.

- DRILL 7 – Walk in pitches. Helps to create momentum and allow the pitcher to increase stride. Allow your pitcher to take 2-3 steps before beginning the pitch. Aim of this drill is to increase stride, so ensure that leg drive/stride is explosive.
- DRILL 8 – From a full pitching motion, increase your pitching distance gradually, focusing on your legs as your basis for strength.

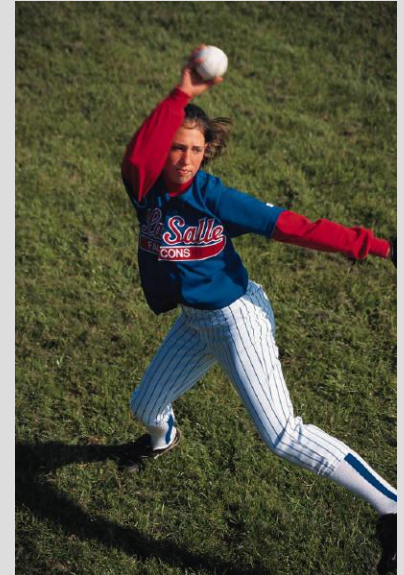


# Drills - Summary

- All of the previous mentioned drills are excellent drills for improving pitching fundamentals and techniques.
- No matter how good a pitcher gets these drills can always be practiced as a warm-up prior to a pitching session.
- Some pitchers focus so much on movement pitches that they forget about their fundamentals and bad habits start to creep in.
- Once you start to learn movement pitches all of these drills can be performed using various grips.

# Identifying Incorrect Techniques

- Straight arm extending out in front of the body on release – lack of or no wrist snap.
- Lack of control – poor/inconsistent release point & lack of wrist snap. Poor posture & eye's not on the target.
- Bent arm at the height of the arm circle – very restricting on the shoulder and puts extra stress on the shoulder.
- Stepping across the body, restricting release and power on follow through – work on centre line.
- Poor ball spin – lack of wrist snap
- Poor speed – slow wrist snap, no leg drive.



# Injury Prevention



How to prevent injury in softball pitchers –

- Correct technique
- Adequate warm up/warm down (including warming up before commencing pitching during a game)
  - Ice (reduces inflammation in joints/muscles)
- Flexibility – athletes do not do enough stretching. Partner stretching is the most effective form of increasing flexibility.
  - Self massage.
- Good core stability. More emphasis should be placed on increasing core stability before prescribing lifting weights to increase strength.

# Mental Game

- Goal Setting

- Positive Self Talk/Affirmations & Imagery (*See It, Think It, Feel It*)

Helps athletes to deal with losing or failing. Build positive images and pictures. See yourself in the moment. Focus on the process not the outcome.

- Relaxation techniques

Usually combines deep breathing techniques to help control heart rate, helping to slow everything down. To be in the zone. Prevents performance anxiety.

- Routines

Familiarity. Athletes develop routines over time. Can start from the moment that they wake up. Different for everybody.

*"I don't totally focus until game time. I'm one of those guys that if you walk into the locker room before the game, you would probably see me fooling around and telling jokes. But 15 minutes later, you can't say a word to me."*

- Michael Jordan.

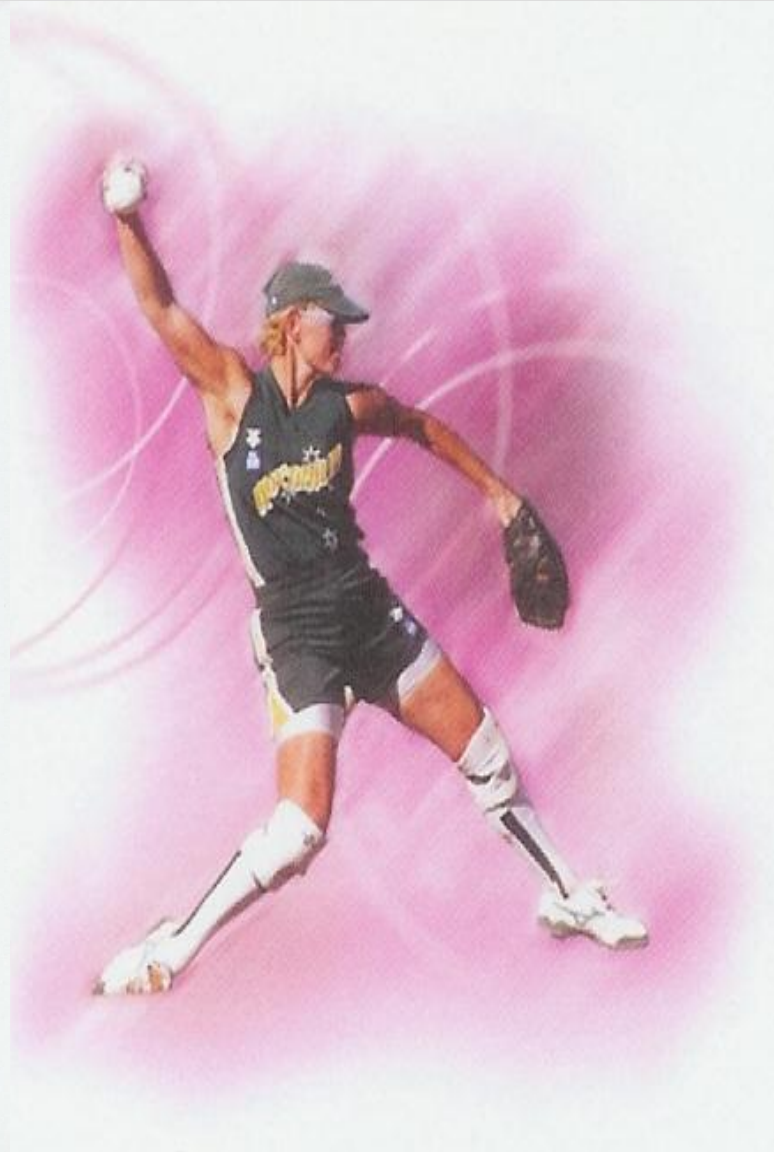


# Training How Much & When

- Junior pitchers can do up to 4 – sessions per week, probably for no longer than 30min (not including warm up).
  - As pitchers develop session can be varied according to their needs. Eg. Working different drills on different days. Working specific pitches as well as game plans etc.
  - Vary pitching training as it can be one of the most monotonous skills to learn. Break the session up into sets (or innings).
    - Try to encourage athletes to keep a diary.
- The more advanced pitchers should be reminded to monitor their own intensity level during training and challenge themselves to greater heights.

*‘HAVE FUN & KEEP THE END IN MIND’*

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