

THROWING

Improving Arm Strengthening and Dealing with Sore Arms

By Cindy Bristow

STRONGER ARMS: As a coach you need to always be asking yourself – “what’s the real goal of what I’m asking my players to do? “. For instance, if we’re talking about strengthening your player’s arms for throwing, then ask yourself why? Why do you want your players to have stronger arms? It’s not for strength’s sake – your players will never have to power lift the other team. So, why then, why have stronger arms?

The answer is because strength helps increase speed and distance, and speed and distance certainly help improve throwing skills. So coaches, we’re going to talk about how to help your players improve their arm strength – not so they can beat their opponents in a power lifting contest – but to help them throw the ball faster and farther.

SORE ARMS: Now in the case of your players having sore arms there is usually one main culprit – OVERUSE! Most of the time players with sore arms are throwing too much and/or too far. It’s common at the very beginning of your season, knowing that you only have a few practices before you have to start playing games, that you hit TONS of groundballs and flyballs to your fielders. There’s nothing wrong with this since you’re trying to give your defense enough work to be ready for the first game. The problem isn’t in the number of balls you hit them, it’s in the fact that they’re *throwing* every single ball! Unless you’re dealing with extremely professional players who condition all winter long, your players show up at the beginning of the season with an arm that hasn’t thrown a ball in a long time. So the absolute worst thing you can do is ask them to start throwing 100’s of balls a day in practice so they can get enough groundball or fly ball repetitions. Below I’ll tell you how to easily limit the number of throws they get while at the same time not limiting their defensive work.

Another area that will also cause sore arms is throwing too far. Be careful with your outfielders early in the year (and also at the end of the season when everyone’s arms are just hanging off) because it’s REAL easy to force them to overthrow just based on how far away they play. The same principle that I mention below will apply to your outfielders in helping limit their number of throws while increasing their flyball repetitions.

Also watch out when your players move up an age group and suddenly are playing on larger fields – those extra feet on the base paths translate into longer throws for everyone; your pitcher, your infielders, your catcher and your outfielders. Gradually increase their number of throws from these longer distances if you want their arms to last the entire season.

Now, Let’s look at some ways to improve both arm strength and arm soreness :

1. **Limit the number of throws your players are making.** One thing we need to keep in mind is that through the course of warming up, practicing defense and making all the thousands of throws required in the tremendous amount of games now being played in youth softball, players are throwing the ball way too much and therefore putting way too much strain on their arms. You'll probably find that most of your players have some sort of arm injury, especially either at the very beginning of the season or once you get toward the end of your season. I mention this because the simplest way to increase the amount of arm strength your players have is to keep their arms fresh, by limiting the number of throws they make.

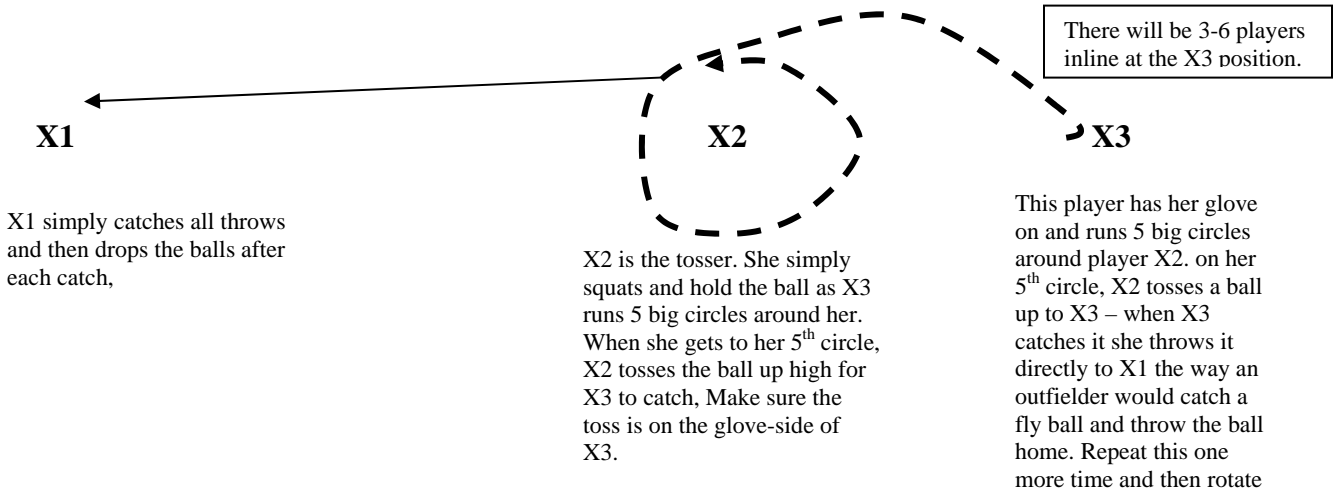
For instance, if you're practicing defense by hitting your players groundballs, they don't have to throw every single ball you hit them. Most of the time coaches will limit the number of ground or fly balls that players get if players have sore arms. This only hurts their defensive improvement. Instead, increase the number of grounders or flyballs and simply limit their number of throws. Have your players throw ever 3rd or 4th ball. They can simply roll the other ones off to the side. This way, they're getting 3 or 4 times more defensive work without putting extra stress and strain on their arms. I did this by getting 2 of those large blue tubs with the rope handles from Walmart and filling them up with as many balls in whatever condition I could find. This entire series (I call rounds) is diagramed out at the end of this.

2. **Distance Throwing:** Teach your players that in order to throw the ball farther they must make their hand move faster as they're letting go of the ball. This additional speed will cause the ball to go farther. They'll also need to make sure they make a bigger circle with their hand (before letting go of the ball) and they need to follow-through longer after letting go of the ball.

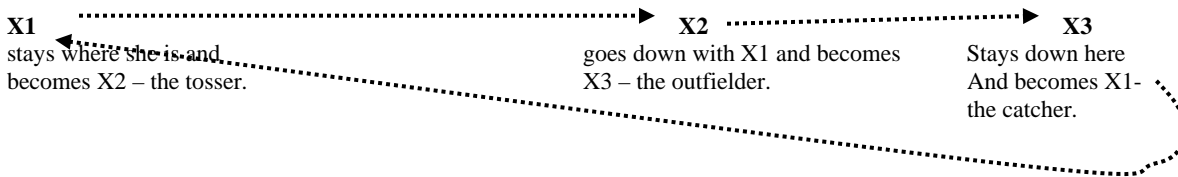
Have your players practice throwing for distance once-in-a-while during practice. You wouldn't do this everyday, maybe every third practice or so. Make sure you're very careful with this, especially early in the season when they haven't built up their arm strength. They can easily do this during warm-ups. When your players pair off and begin throwing to each other, as they get warmer gradually have them back up. Maybe have them take 6 big steps backwards every so often, until eventually they're whatever distance would be considered a long throw for their age group. Coaches, keep in mind that what's a long distance for your 12 year olds would not be considered long for college or professional players. Conversely, what college level players would consider long throws, your 12 year olds would need cannons in order to make. So make sure you are doing what's best for the age and skill level you coach.

3. Throwing Drill for Distance:
 - This drill consists of groups of 3 players, each with their glove on and each groups with about 10 balls.

- The groups are about 80-90 feet apart for 18 year olds and older, about 60-70 feet apart for 14-16 year olds, and about 40-60 feet apart for 10-13 year olds.



When players rotate, they'll rotate as follows:



Here's a defensive workout that can be done in 20-30 minutes that will allow all of your players to get over 100 balls hit to them at numerous positions without requiring them to also make over 100 throws. This can be done either during practice, as a pre-game warmup, or both

- This is a defensive repetition workout for your entire team
- Requires to people hitting balls (both don't have to be coaches but they can be)
- Both hitters have as large a tub of balls as possible next to them to allow them to hit as many balls as possible
- The catchers will get balls from the tubs and toss to coaches so hitters don't have to get balls.
- Players don't throw the ball – they roll the balls off to the off-field players after every ball they field.
- This Drill goes in 4 parts – each part lasts until both tubs of balls are empty (then stop, collect all balls back into the tubs and then begin next round)

ROUND 1:

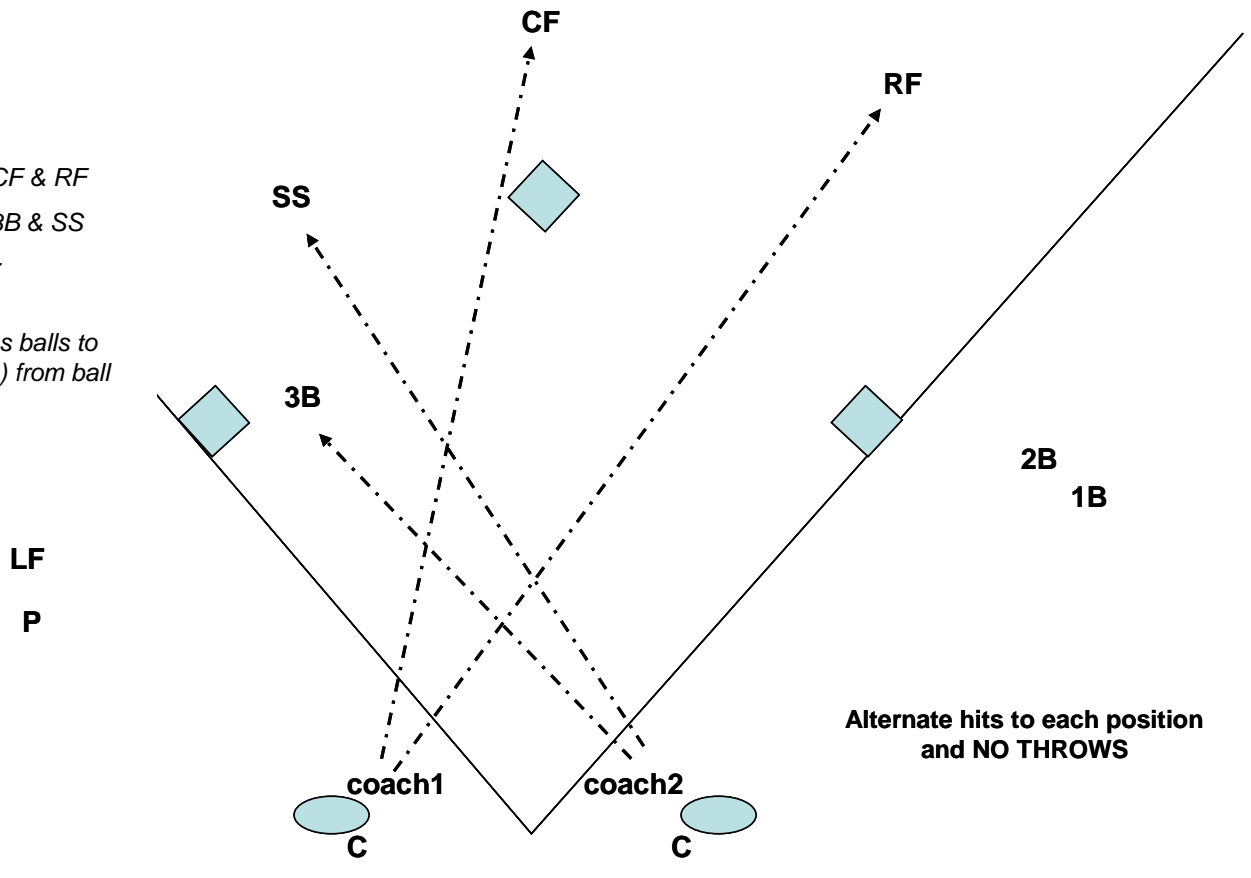
Coach1 hits to CF & RF

Coach2 hits to 3B & SS

Resting off field:

LF, 2B, 1B, P

Catchers (c) toss balls to hitters (coaches) from ball tub



ROUND 2:

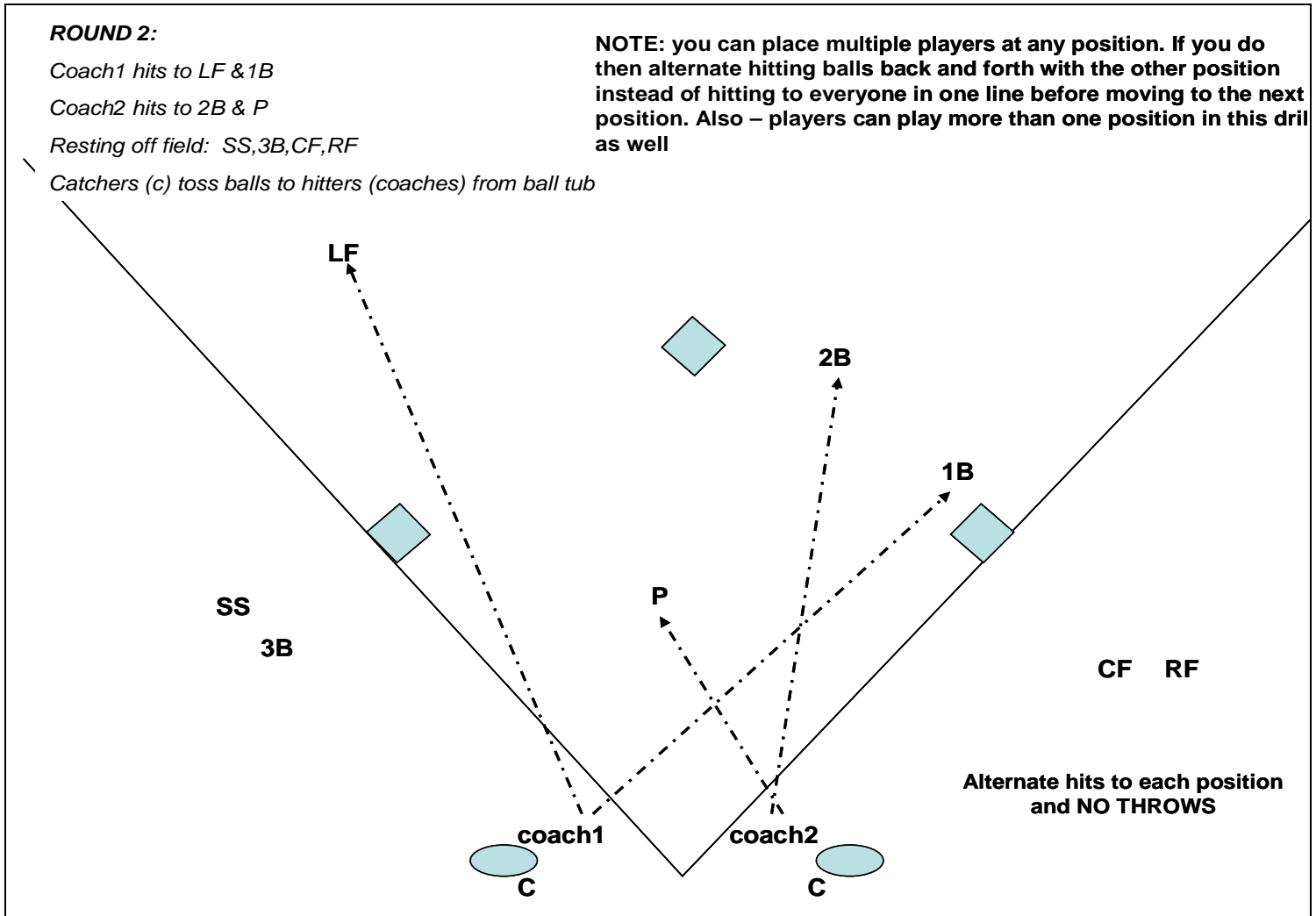
Coach1 hits to LF & 1B

Coach2 hits to 2B & P

Resting off field: SS,3B,CF,RF

Catchers (c) toss balls to hitters (coaches) from ball tub

NOTE: you can place multiple players at any position. If you do then alternate hitting balls back and forth with the other position instead of hitting to everyone in one line before moving to the next position. Also – players can play more than one position in this drill as well



ROUND 3: (ADDS THROWING TO ROUND 1)

Coach1 hits to CF & RF – both throw to 2nd

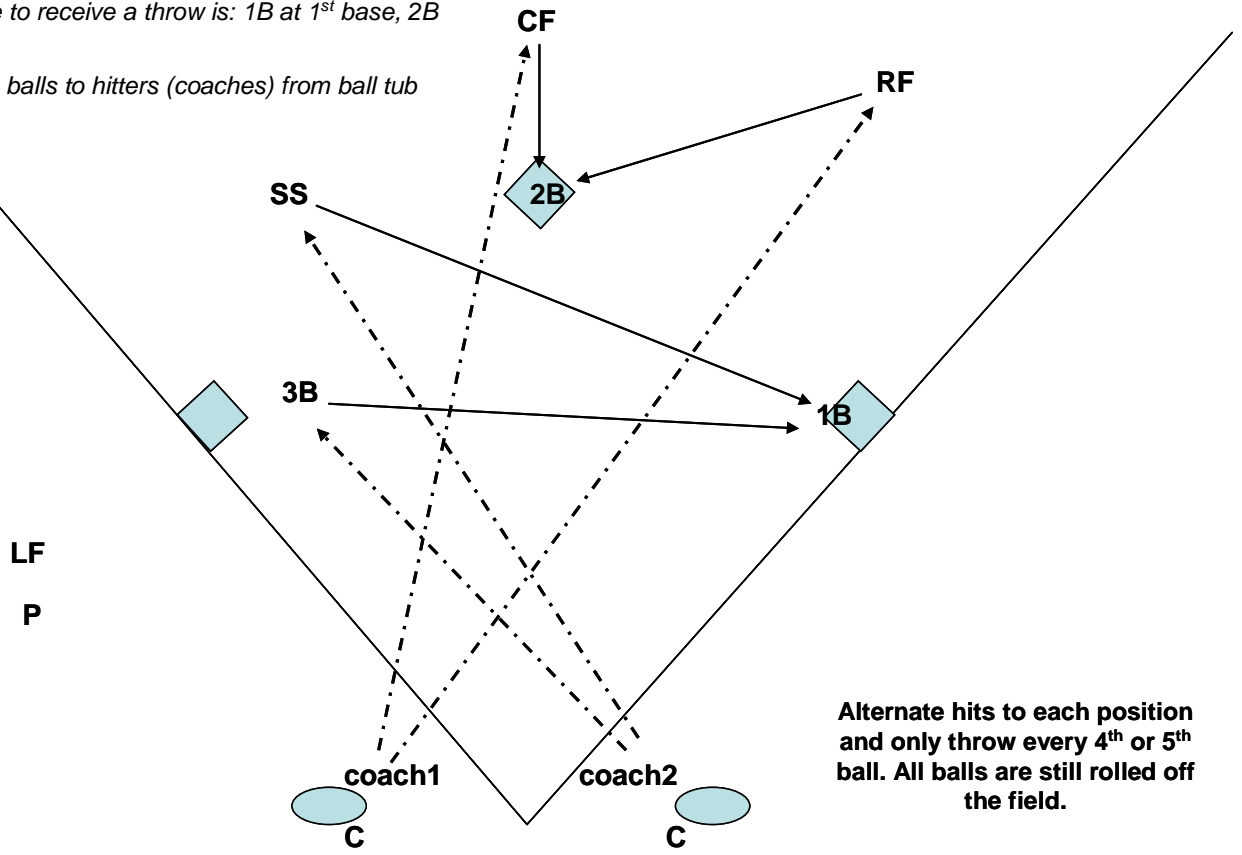
Coach2 hits to 3B & SS – both throw to 1st

Resting off field: LF,P

Playing at a base to receive a throw is: 1B at 1st base, 2B at 2nd base

Catchers (c) toss balls to hitters (coaches) from ball tub

Have your players throw every 4th - 5th ball they field and NOT every single ball that you hit them.



ROUND 4: (ADD THROWS TO ROUND 2)

Coach1 hits to LF who throws to 3rd base, & 1B who throws to 2nd base.

Coach2 hits to 2B who throws to 3rd base & P who throws to 2nd base.

Resting off field: CF,RF

Playing at a base to receive a throw is: SS at 2nd base, 3B at 3rd base

Catchers (c) toss balls to hitters (coaches) from ball tub

Make sure to slow down in between hits and make sure your fielder is ready and that the player at the base receiving the throw is as well.

