



Pitching Breakdown
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First and foremost if you are a coach or parent please note that not all pitchers are the same and sometimes what you tell is a kid is not always what happens in the pitch but what they should feel happens in a pitch. If you are trying to correct something and the pitcher is still doing the same thing over and over, then you are not getting her to feel the correct way. I will always recommend that you consult a pitching instructor, and know that there are different ways to pitch as long as the basics are there.

(1) MECHANICS FIRST – Learn, practice, and develop good pitching mechanics first...do NOT worry about throwing strikes when you are learning how to pitch. Learn how to do it right, make certain that everything is correct and smooth, then later you can start adding speed. Control (throwing strikes) should not be an issue in the beginning. First learn the correct way of doing the pitching motion and delivery. Then LATER you can work on being accurate and throwing strikes.

(2) BEFORE PITCHING – Always do a pre-practice pre-pitching routine. Pitchers who don't take adequate time to properly get ready to throw the ball run the risk of injuring themselves, and always pitch slower and with less accuracy. A good preparation always involves (1) **Jogging** (to loosen tight body muscles), (2) **Stretching** (arms, legs, hamstrings, throwing arm shoulder, and midsection...stomach/abs and lower back) for several minutes, (3) Loosen the throwing arm by starting with easy **Overhand throws** from a shorter distance (4) gradually working back to a **Longer Distance** and harder overhand throwing. Then, do the same thing underhanded: (5) **Short distance underhand pitching**, then gradually working back to (6) **Full-distance, Full-speed pitching**.

(3) PRESENTATION – Although this doesn't have anything to do with "mechanics" of pitching, this is a good time to discuss how to properly approach the pitching rubber. Most softball leagues and sanctioning associations require girl pitchers to approach the pitching rubber from behind (the side away from the batter) to prepare for a pitch. So now is the time to get used to doing it. Step up to the rubber from behind, and with your hands apart, at your side. The ball can be either in your glove or hand. Make sure not to grip the ball at this point. Younger pitchers tend to grip early showing the opponent what they are about to throw.

(4) STANCE – Take a stance on the pitching rubber that is comfortable...standing tall, with your shoulders back, and your feet far enough apart for you to be balanced, hands at your side (ball in one, glove on the other), and your neck and upper body muscles feeling totally relaxed. The feet must be placed where the league and softball sanctioning associations require them to be. Typically the front (throwing arm side) "push-off" foot should be placed at the front middle of the pitching rubber, and at least half of it must be on the surface of the rubber. The rear (or "stride") glove-side foot will be behind the rubber at least touching the rear edge of the pitching rubber.

(5) GRIP– Although there is no definite right or wrong way for a beginning pitcher to hold the ball, she should develop habits now in preparation for pitches that she will be developing later. Therefore, I recommend that every pitcher start by using a "4-seam" grip...one that will cause the pitched ball to rotate top-to-bottom with all four seams cutting the air. For the basic 4-seam grip, place the pads of your fingers on the seams on the side of the "U" (horseshoe).



(6) VISUALIZE – As you are standing on the pitching rubber getting ready to start

your motion, take a second to try to “see” in your mind the path that the ball will take when you throw it. Although this is not really part of basic “mechanics” it is a good idea to get used to the idea of visualizing the trajectory of the ball... from the point that you will be releasing it alongside your hip...all the way into the catcher’s mitt. The concept of “creative visualization” can eventually assist in your fielding, throwing, and hitting as well.

(7) BRING THE BALL AND GLOVE TOGETHER – This is the part that follows the “Presentation” of the ball. Up to this point, your pre-pitch stance has kept your hands at your side. Most softball leagues and associations require that the ball and the glove must touch together (usually at least for one second) before starting the pitching motion. I recommend that you make the ball-glove contact close to where your hands have been hanging...in front of you, and below your waist but there can be many variations of this. This is also where you want to grip the ball so that you hide it from your opponent.

(8) STARTING THE MOTION - Although many pitchers have developed a habit of a lot of extra motion into the pre-pitch routine, bringing your hands way above your head or bending over at the waist at this point are simply extra movement and energy that is being used, that will not really affect the speed or control of the pitch. I recommend...especially for beginning pitchers...that you start with your hands low, keep the ball-glove touch below the waist, and then go right directly into your backswing. And again, although there is no right or wrong way to begin your pitch there are ways that are better for certain pitchers to use to reinforce better habits.

(9) BACK-SWING – The speed or height of your backswing are not important. Do what you feel is comfortable. Typically, most pitchers will bring the ball out of their glove and swing back to a point where the arm is approximately level. If it feels more comfortable, take the arm back at a somewhat slower speed. The only time arm speed counts is when it is going forward, especially during the final downswing just before the release point. You also want to be careful that you are not bringing the swing too high where it starts to turn your shoulders early, or too much behind you back throwing your arm circle offline.

(10) FORWARD MOVEMENT...WEIGHT TRANSFER – After your arm does its backswing, as it starts coming forward, so will your body. The purpose of the “body lean” is to start the transfer of your body weight from your rear leg to the forward “push off” foot.

(11) THE PUSH OFF - It will be the push against the front edge of the pitching rubber that starts the drive outward, the long step, and the resulting speed of the pitch. Here the pitcher needs to feel a slight lift of the pushing foot but stay close to the ground so that it doesn’t become a crow hop.

(12) CLOSED-OPEN-CLOSED – This is the most difficult part of learning to pitch. When you are standing on the pitching rubber facing the catcher, you are in a “**closed**” position (imagine yourself as a door as seen by the catcher...you are “closed”). But then, as you take the long step forward, approximately halfway through your arm rotation you will be in an “**open**” position...totally sideways to the catcher. Then as the arm comes down in the final swing toward the release, the upper body, then the hips will start to “close” very slightly. However, the pitcher should “feel” as if she is open. Then, after the release, the hips will continue to close, allowing the pitcher to finish in the “ready” position...facing the batter. Depending on the pitcher it is also okay to stay open through the whole pitch only closing slightly. There have been many different debates and opinions on this topic. Pitching coaches used to teach pitchers to really whip their hips closed but over time the theories have changed to where you should keep them more open. In breaking down an Olympic pitcher you can see that they keep their hips open or mostly open through much of the pitch and even after, only closing slightly.



(13) THE STRIDE – The step that you take with your glove-side foot is often referred to as the “stride”. Although there is much disagreement among pitching instructors on this issue, I have found that in most cases, those pitchers who have a longer (and faster) stride throw a better fastball. Although you want to push out farther you do not want to increase the distance between both legs creating an unbalanced pitcher. How long should the stride be? Although this is something that must be right for the pitcher, a typical stride for a leaping-style pitcher is 90% to 120% of her height. I encourage our pitchers to stride five inches or more beyond their height. Therefore, a 5’6” pitcher will often stride 6 feet or more.

(14) LEAP & DRAG – All pitchers will either take a long step or “leap” out to get better distance. However, all organizations sponsoring girls softball do not allow a pitcher to become airborne (crowhop) during the pitch...it is illegal to have both feet in the air at the same time. That is why pitchers who use a “leaping” style must also “drag” the toe of the push-off foot on the ground until the stride foot touches down. Typically, this toe drag will be on inside of the toe of the shoe, and will make an arc pattern in the dirt starting at the pitching rubber and continuing toward the glove side for a foot or more. If a pitcher gets a good push off of the mound they might slightly lift their foot in the beginning of the pitch which is usually not noticeable with the naked eye but can be seen when you slow mo the pitcher on video. If this is the case I wouldn’t discourage the pitcher from doing it, if you do it may cause her to try and keep her foot down too much and make her lean forward increasing the distance between both legs as mentioned before. If the foot is getting more than an inch or two off the ground and it is noticeable to the naked eye then they should try to correct it and keep it dragging more so she is not called for an illegal pitch.



(15) ARM ROTATION – As the arm comes forward, keep it relaxed and straight...but not stiff. The arm speed should be consistent and fast the whole way around (Eventually, you will learn to add an “arm whip”... accelerating the arm during the final portion of the arm swing just before the release.)

(16) NO BOBBLE HEAD - During this entire arm circle and closed-open-closed sequence, do NOT let your head move sideways. As much as you can, keep your head straight...not stiff...just straight. I often find that if a right-handed pitcher’s head tilts left, the pitch goes to the right.

THE RELEASE – There are several important things that need to happen as the arm swings down toward the release point...and they need to happen at the same time:

- **(17) Keep the wrist back** as your arm approaches the release point so it can automatically whip forward at the precise instant you release the ball.
- **(19) Keep your arm outstretched**, but not stiff, as you release the ball. Do not allow your elbow to bend more than 15 or 20 degrees.
- **(20) “Snapping”** – As you arm begins to whip near you thigh you feel the wrist fling forward in

what I call the wrist snap.

- **(21) Fingers behind the ball** – You can get better speed and control if your fingers are behind the ball as it leaves your hand. I often tell pitchers to think of it as “pointing the inside of your wrist toward the catcher.” Some pitchers are taught to “roll the ball over” as it is being released in order to get a slight curve or drop on the fastball...but I recommend against that. In developing a younger pitcher they often get confused and roll the snap over too early and end up throwing a change up or drop when trying to throw a fastball.
- **(22) Stay tall** at the release. Bring your shoulders back as your pitching arm starts its final downswing toward the release point, so you can be upright and tall at the finish. **Do NOT bend at the waist.** Bending slows down pitching speed, and often causes pitches to go high.
- **(23) Keep your shoulders level** as you release the pitch...no dipping down on the throwing-arm side.



(24) THE FOLLOW-THROUGH – This is another of those areas where pitching instructors often have differing opinions. Our recommendation is to let the arm go where it wants to naturally. At the instant the ball has left your hand, allow your arm to relax, bend, and follow through straight ahead. For most pitchers who use the fingers-behind-the-ball and inside-of-the-wrist-toward-the-catcher method, the arm will bend slightly, then follow through straight ahead (not across the body) with the pitching hand finishing up somewhere waist-high or above, and moving toward the bicep or shoulder. This is sometimes referred to as an elbow point meaning the pitcher’s elbow is pointing toward the target when the finish. This is usually very effective when teaching younger kids so that they snap the ball straight up. There are often problems developed with this if the pitcher begins to get too tight at the elbow.