

**BEGINNING PITCHING TIPS**  
**BRYC Softball**  
**Updated February 4, 2008**

General

1. Work on sound mechanics before anything else. The earlier a player learns the mechanics, the quicker she will progress in learning speed and control. While learning the mechanics, keep the speed up. The mechanics are tied to pitching with speed, and slowing down the pitch will make the mechanics difficult to learn. Also, any special pitches (change up, drop, etc.) need to wait until the player has learned the mechanics.
2. Quality of practice is very important. Pitching is all about learning muscle memory. It hurts a pitcher's development to practice infrequently (not enough time for muscles to learn the motion) or when tired (muscles start to learn bad mechanics). It really helps in the beginning to work on one pitching drill for 15 minutes daily. After she develops her pitching skills, she needs to pitch every other day to keep her skills sharp.
3. Pitching is about attitude and overcoming adversity. It takes time to learn to pitch very well, and a player needs to learn that she will be wild at the beginning. During a game, a pitcher needs to be relaxed at all times, regardless of the score. Relaxed muscles work faster and more efficiently. Tense muscles work slower. Thus, when a pitcher tries to throw harder, the result is usually slower. The best pitchers at any level usually are those who are the most confident and relaxed.
4. A pitcher is also a player. After she throws a pitch, she is now an infielder. She needs to work on throwing, catching, batting, and running skills. Besides drills, make sure she practices game situations. Also, since our league rules restrict the number of innings a pitcher can pitch, she needs to learn other positions.

Mechanics of the Throw

The key factor is the power line. This is the line from the ball of the pivot (back) foot to the toe of the front foot. This line should point a home plate (the target). All the arm motion is along the power line. (See attached figure for illustration.)

1. Start with the ball of the right foot on the front of the pitching rubber, and the toe of the left foot on the back of the rubber. (Opposite for left handers.) The weight should be balanced. Arms should be apart with the ball in the throwing hand. Feet should be shoulder width apart. Ball should be in the fingers (not palm) of the throwing hand. (Figure 1.1)
2. Shift weight to left foot, usually by a slight rock backwards. Rotate the right foot about 45 degrees, keeping contact with the pitching rubber. Arms now come together. (Rule requirement that ball touch glove once before the pitch starts.) (Figure 1.3)
3. The weight shifts to the right foot. (Figure 1.4) Start a step with left foot towards the plate along power line. The stride is small at first, and lengthens after the player leans control and starts to increase speed. (Eventually, the pitcher learns to “explode” into this step.) At the

same time, separate arms with the glove (left) hand pointing at the plate and the throwing (right) hand rising to start the windmill motion through the power line. The pitcher “pushes” her arms forward at this step. (Figure 1.5)

4. As throwing arm rises to full vertical, the left starts to descend to the power line. The pitcher's body should resemble the small letter "k" at this point.) This opens the torso with the hips at a 45 degree angle to the power line and the chest facing on the home side of third base. (Figure 1.6)
5. Complete the step and plant the forward (left) foot at a 45 degree angle to the power line, , but don't lock it. Swing the throwing (right) arm down to the point where the arm is at the right hip. The ball is released at the hip with wrist flip with the arm vertical and the shoulders slightly open. The player also pushes off the back (right) leg during the release. Snap the glove (left) arm down to help increase the throwing arm speed. We call this “driving the back knee forward.” The right hip also starts moving forward to add speed to the body. (Figure 1.7)
6. At the point of release, use the wrist to flip the ball forward. (Think of the wrist snap as the last motion in shooting a free throw in basketball.) The right hip keeps rotating forward as the hand passes the hip. This closes the torso so that the chest faces the plate. Let the back leg naturally move forward behind front leg, making sure the foot drags. Follow through with the throwing arm, and regain balance. (Figure 1.8)

### Teaching the Mechanics

We work with a set of progressive drills that starting with the wrist flip and works backwards to the beginning of the pitch. When a player has mastered one drill, she is ready to move on to the next drill. When working on a drill in practice, the pitcher should first quickly run through a few throws using the techniques of a previous drill. For example, warm up for drill #5 by taking a few throws using drills #1 through #4.

1. Arm forward and horizontal, flip ball up using only the wrist. The fingers should be curled after the flip. Work on the height and accuracy of this flip.
2. Arms spread at shoulder width and vertical. Flip ball from throwing hand to glove along the power line. Work on the speed and accuracy of this flip.
3. Arms spread at shoulder width and vertical. Flip ball along the power line to the catcher. Work on the speed and accuracy of this flip.
4. With the feet along the power line, glove hand pointing at catcher and throwing arm back and horizontal. Swing arm down and release with a wrist flip.
5. With the feet along the power line, glove hand pointing at catcher and throwing arm above the head ("k" position). Swing arm down and release with a wrist flip.
6. With the feet along the power line, glove hand pointing at catcher and throwing arm down. Swing arm around and release with a wrist flip.

7. With the feet along the power line, both arms hanging down. Raise glove hand to point at catcher and swing throwing arm around and release with a wrist flip.
8. Starting from the pitching position with both feet on the rubber, throw the windmill pitch but with a small step.
9. Drill #8 starting with feet on rubber and emphasize pushing with the pivot (right) foot.
10. Drill #9 with large step.

### Mechanics Problems and Corrections

Any pitcher may, from time to time, develop bad mechanics. This can happen after a long period without practice (e.g., winter) or after an injury or when tired. Below are some common mechanics faults and drills that help to correct the fault.

1. Leaning to side: This sometimes happens as a player tries to increase the ball speed during the step. It can lead to shoulder and hip injury because it places more stress on these joints. Use drill #5 to correct, but use it with the pitcher's torso facing a fence or wall. That physical barrier will keep the pitcher from leaning.
2. Leaning forward: This happens during the step. Use drill #5 to correct. This drill starts with the ball above the pitcher's head, which helps keep the torso erect. Also give the pitcher a verbal clue of "shoulders up" to help her visualize what to do.
3. Shoulders not completely open: This is a common problem because the pitcher starts by facing the batter and wants to continue to face the batter. This is an important problem to fix because it can lead to shoulder injury. Use drill #4 to correct, and make sure that the shoulders completely open before she throws. It also helps to use drill #8 but without throwing the ball. This helps her focus on the pivot and opening the shoulders.
4. Arm behind player (over-opening the shoulders): You'll notice this if you stand behind the catcher and see the ball go behind the pitcher's torso on the downswing. This action leads to wildness because the pitcher needs to over-compensate to get the ball back on line to the plate. It usually occurs because the pitcher is pulling the ball up off line. Use drill #5 to correct and then move to drill #6. It may help for her to go through drill #6 in slow motion with you controlling the position of her arm.
5. Hips never close: This fault takes away speed because it keeps the right shoulder back and pulls on the right arm. Use drill #5 without a ball and after release, have the pitcher raise her pitching arm to the vertical and pull up her right knee. (Think of a drum major high stepping.) This will start training the right hip to close during the release.
6. Locked elbow at release: This takes away from the speed of the arm because it makes the arm behave as a rod rather than a whip. Correct this by first getting the pitcher to loosen her arm. I generally have her shake it. Then use drill #5 without a ball while trying to keep that same feeling of being loose. Then use the drill with a rubber ball as she throws into a wall.

7. Poor wrist snap: You'll see this when the pitcher's fingers are point out from the wrist after release. This isn't too bad because this is one of the ways to throw a change up pitch, but it takes speed away from the fastball. Use drill #1 to #2 to correct. Drill #1 can be done at home using rolled up socks as a ball.
8. Stepping to side: This is a common problem during the early days of a pitcher's career. The best way to correct this is to draw a line in the dirt from the pitching rubber to the center of the plate, and use drill #8 without a ball. After every pitch, show her where she landed her left foot. The toe should be on the line.
9. Too long step: This is a common problem as a pitcher tries to develop speed by pushing off with her right foot. This can lead to a very large step which tends to keep her hips open. Use drill #8 without a ball and then gradually have her add the right foot push. Make sure she works on closing her hips with the shoulders during this drill.

### Troubleshooting During Games

You will often notice during a game that your pitcher is having problems. But you don't have the ability to run through a drill or two to correct the problem. There are two quick things you can tell her to help her get back her accuracy. Both are positive in terms of what to do.

If the pitch is too left or right, ask her to "step and reach for the plate." The most common reason for wild pitches in the horizontal is stepping to the side or not opening the shoulders. Focusing on the step and reaching with the glove to the plate will open the shoulders and get her throwing along the power line again.

If the pitch is too high or low, ask her to "release at the hip." Wildness in the vertical is due to an early release (too low) or late release (too high). Focusing on the hip gets her back to her normal release point.

### Warming Up for Games

In warming up, remember that the pitcher needs a good stretch to put the most into her pitch. A tight pitcher is a slow pitcher. Start with a slow run to get the blood moving and leg muscles warmed up. Then progress into light overhand throwing to get the arm muscles warm. Then after the normal team arm stretching, have the pitchers doL

- V stretch
- Butterfly stretch
- Quad stretch
- Hip rotator stretch
- Hamstring stretch

After stretching, throwing, fielding, and batting warm up, the best thing is to quickly run through drills #3, #4, #5, #7, and #9, progressing to the next drill when the pitcher feels comfortable that she is throwing well. Then work on throwing with the full motion to a catcher, and then hitting corners of the plate. At the end, work on any special pitches the pitcher may have (change, drop, curve, etc.) This also makes for a good short pitching practice.

Allow sufficient time for the starting pitcher to warm up. Each pitcher has her own time needs. Have the starting catcher warm up the starting pitcher so that the catcher is ready to catch when the game starts. If possible, have a coach watch the pitcher to diagnose any problems with the pitcher's motion. Finally, leave enough time between the warm up and game for the pitcher to catch her breath, and then focus on the game.

### Relief Pitchers

Expect that you will need a reliever. Some leagues have maximum inning restrictions on pitchers. Regardless, you do not know if or when your starting pitcher may lose her motion or need a break.

It is best to decide who will be your reliever before the game and tell her. She should do a less intense pitching warm up with another catcher or coach before the game, and get complete her warm up the offensive inning before you intend to send her in to pitch.

### Drills

- Three circles: Right knee down, left knee up, wind up three times and throw on the third one. This drill helps the pitcher stay balanced.
- K with back to wall: Stand as described, and throw. This drill corrects pitcher who winds ball behind head.
- K with front to wall: Stand as described, and throw. This drill corrects pitcher who casts her throwing arm out.
- Pendulum: From K, swing ball from behind hip to when arm is horizontal past release point, do 4 or 5 times, then release the ball at release point. Repeat. This drill helps the pitcher learn to follow through.

### Resources

If your daughter really wants to be a pitcher, her best resource is her parents. She needs you to be her catcher for those non-practice days. She needs your eyes to help find the mechanic faults. She needs your encouragement for those days when the ball goes anywhere but where she aims.

There are books and videos that help explain pitching. My best advice is to browse at Borders or Barnes & Noble and find a book that explains pitching in terms that you best understand. It also helps to go to a high school or tournament softball game and watch the pitching. Seeing the skills is sometimes the best way to understand how they come together.

# The Basic Windmill Motion

(from Fastpitch Softball: The Windmill Pitcher by Barry Sammons, Masters Pres, 1997)



Fig. 1.1



Fig. 1.2



Fig. 1.3



Fig. 1.4



Fig. 1.5



Fig. 1.6



Fig. 1.7



Fig. 1.8