

PITCHING PROBLEMS

COACHES: This is material that both pitchers and catchers should share. Although catchers are not expected to be pitching experts, it is helpful if they understand something about pitching mechanics and technique. This is useful when the pitcher runs into minor problems that need to be resolved immediately.

"LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ABOUT PITCHING TECHNIQUE"

An example of this would be when the pitcher's drop pitch suddenly stops breaking during a game. Immediate adjustments must be made to regain the pitch.

Most pitcher problems that occur during games can be classified into four categories. These are;

- a) Mechanical Problems
- b) Control Problems
- c) Pitch Movement Problems, and
- d) Psychological Problems

MECHANICAL PROBLEMS

Pitching mechanics are the domain of the pitcher and pitching coach, but there are a few points the catcher can and should keep an eye on. The first is the pitcher's stride. Make sure it is straight toward home plate and not out to the side. Second, watch the follow-through. The pitching arm and hand should move directly to the target.

CONTROL PROBLEMS

If the pitches are scattered with no consistent pattern it probably means the pitcher hasn't thrown enough pitches to define the release point precisely enough. More repetitions in practice or longer warm-up will help.

Specific wildness means the pitcher is missing the target, but consistently in one area or another; i.e. the ball tends to go high or low, left or right. This can be caused by stride direction and/or follow-through. Sometimes pitchers try to over-throw the ball which has the same effect.

PITCH MOVEMENT PROBLEMS

The three basic factors that affect the amount of break on any pitch are;

1. **BALL ROTATION.** A pitch always breaks in the direction of its spin. So if a pitch fails to break, the first thing to check is the rotation on the ball. Let the pitcher know immediately if this needs to be corrected.
2. **PITCH LOCATION.** To be effective, pitches not only need to break, but they must be seen to break, by the batter. So all pitches must be thrown at the proper location.
3. **WIND DIRECTION.** Catchers should understand that it is the air movement across the surface of the ball, that makes the pitch change direction. Maximum "stuff" is achieved when there is a light wind blowing from the backstop out toward the pitcher. In order to gauge the effect of the wind on the pitch, it is preferable for the pitcher to warm up throwing towards home plate.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS.

This is a summary of the most common game problems pitchers tend to encounter, regarding their emotional state or thinking processes. Catchers can help by being supportive and encouraging. The suggested actions are not fool-proof, so the catcher will have to experiment to find out what works for each pitcher.

1. PITCHER LOSES CONFIDENCE.

- Be assertive; give the impression you are in charge and all is under control.
- Encourage use of positive "self-talk".
- Remind pitcher of recent successes.

2. PITCHER LOSES COMPOSURE.

- Focus on batter's weakness, and the target.
- Concentrate on retiring each batter individually, one pitch at a time.
- Emphasize need for positive outlook.
- Intentionally slow the game pace.

3. OVER-ACTIVATED

- Remind pitcher to "CENTER" and "FOCUS".
- Reduce importance of game in pitcher's mind.
- Increase number of warm-up pitches. (output).
- Remind pitcher to use mental imagery.
- Calmly discuss strategy with pitcher.

4. UNDER-ACTIVATED

- Focus on game importance.
- Elevate calibre of opposing hitters.
- Remind pitcher of his/her importance.
- Help pitcher use an energizing technique.

5. PITCHER INTIMIDATED

- Remind pitcher ALL hitters have a weakness.
- Good hitters are consistent - remind pitcher to use that to advantage.
- Remind pitcher the odds favour you. Hitting success is measured in terms of .300, so the best hitters are out 70% of the time.