

LEARNING THE RISE BALL

Hey Pitchers! How would you like to learn a simple, effective way to learn how to throw an effective Rise Ball?

After more than fifty years as a player, coach and instructor, I still find this one of the most difficult softballs skills to teach. But over that time I have been able to work out shortcuts in learning the pitch, so I'd like to share these ideas with you.

What follows is a step by step procedure (six of them) that will clarify the central issues and make the process a whole lot easier. If you follow the sequence, I think you will be surprised at how easy this thing can be. Good luck!

DAVE PEARCE

STEP 1. - AERODYNAMICS

The first thing you need to understand is the aerodynamics involved; what causes a pitch to change direction, whether that pitch is a curve, a drop or a rise ball. So learn the aerodynamics of pitch movement. If you are not sure about this, check it out in any encyclopaedia under, "Bernoulli Effect" or "Bernoulli's Principle", or "Aerodynamics". Better still, the principle is clearly explained in my Instruction Manual, "GOLD MEDAL SOFTBALL PITCHING - LEVEL 2."

Once you understand this basic principle of aerodynamics, you will realize that any pitch will break in the direction of its rotation. So the rise ball must rotate backwards, as seen by the pitcher. The more perfect the rotation, the more effective the pitch will be. So throwing the rise pitch is simply a daily struggle to impart a perfect backward spin on the ball.

***BALL
ROTATION*****STEP 2. - BACKSPIN**

The next thing is to learn the sensation of what it feels like to release a pitch so that it spins backward. This is an important step, because if you start right in to throw the pitch without first learning the feeling of creating a reverse rotation, progress will be slower. So you need to get the feel of achieving a backward spin before you actually throw a pitch. Here's how:

***GET THE
FEELING***

Stand sideways, glove side to the catcher. For this drill, the catcher should only be about 3 to 5 steps away.

Now hold the ball in front of the body with the palm up and the fingers pointing away. Simply lay the ball in the palm of the pitching hand with no attempt at any specific grip. Now simply swing the arm back and forward in a scooping or shoveling action, while twisting the hand backward, as if turning a door knob. The ball is released from underneath with the palm up.

***RELEASE
PALM UP***

Ensure you keep the little finger side of the pitching hand towards the catcher, while performing this pendulum action. When the ball is released, it will roll off the index finger as the back of the hand rotates forward, toward the catcher. This should create the desired backspin, or some semblance of it.

***BACKWARD
TWIST***

After thirty or forty repetitions, when you are comfortable with this feeling and can a partial or pure backspin, you are ready for the next step. That is, learning the proper grip and release of the pitch.

STEP 3. - GRIP

At this point, let me emphasize that there is no right or wrong grip for any pitch. Whatever works is right. But you have start somewhere, then experiment with alternatives until you find what works best for you.

There are several grips commonly accepted in throwing the rise ball, but Fig. A illustrates the most popular grip used in North America. This is recommended as the starting point for all pitchers because it is easiest to achieve, and causes the least discomfort. You can use two, three or four fingers, as long as the grip is firm and comfortable.

Two things are important to remember here. First, make sure your finger nails, especially the index finger, are cut short. They should be no longer than the end of the finger. Second, when gripping the ball, keep the index and second finger close together, preferably on the same seam.

Once you have a comfortable grip, practice taking it while the ball is in your glove and without looking at it. Ten or fifteen repetitions should suffice for this purpose.

STEP 4. - RELEASE POSITION

Now you are ready to apply the correct release technique for the rise pitch. Stand in the pitching position with the stride foot in front of the pivot foot. You should be holding the ball with the proper grip at your pitching side. Now turn the palm of their hand outward, extending the thumb backward as far as possible. Your natural flexibility will determine how far back you can turn your hand. See Fig. B.

PALM UP - THUMB BACK At this point the palm is up, the fingers are under the ball and the thumb is pointing toward second base. This may be uncomfortable at first, practice holding this position for about six seconds, followed by ten seconds rest. Repeat this process eight or ten times until the position starts to feel more natural.

STEP 5. - RELEASE TECHNIQUE

TURN THE DOOR KNOB As the pitch is released, the hand continues to twist backwards, with the back of the hand rotating towards the catcher as in the first drill. Ensure that you use a twisting action of the wrist rather than a sideward motion which will create side spin on the ball, instead of the desired backspin.

The expression, "turn the door knob", helps many pitchers understand the correct wrist action.

Now, with the catcher only four or five steps away, practice the release technique by throwing the ball very softly to the catcher. Use only a pendulum motion at this point, with the feet in a fixed position, as if the stride had been completed.

_____ If you have a problem achieving the correct release technique, here's a simple drill that will help. Find a flat, clear wall you can use.
WALL DRILL

_____ Stand against the wall with your pitching hand raised overhead, palm flat on the wall. Now make an arm circle while keeping your palm flat against the wall. At the release point, the hand should be "inside-out".

_____ Continue the circle action to the follow-through position, keeping the palm against the wall. Repeat this drill 10 times, then return to throwing the ball to the catcher from a short distance, keeping your, "palm against the wall".
RELEASE INSIDE-OUT

_____ Continue this easy throwing until you can throw 20 to 25 consecutive pitches with the proper backspin. When you have achieved this level of perfection, you can start backing up, extending the distance to the catcher, while continuing to throw with a pendulum motion.

Continue this procedure until you reach two thirds to three quarters your normal game distance. At this point start using the windmill action, but without increasing pitch speed. If at any time during this progression you lose the proper spin, move in and start over from a shorter distance.

STEP 6.- FOLLOW-THROUGH

As pitching distance and pitch velocity increase gradually (over a period of 30 minutes or so), the pitcher concentrate on pitch follow-through.

The pitching hand continues up to shoulder, or even head height. Focus on continuing the wrist and hand rotation so that the thumb turns toward the catcher after each pitch.

From this point on it is a matter of practice to perfect the release and backspin, and to get the pitch at the right spot, i.e. at the upper corners of the strike zone.

PITCH DEVELOPMENT STAGES

The Rise Pitch normally develops in three stages. Understanding this will help you in identifying problems and finding workable solutions.

STAGE 1. - SPIRAL SPIN

In this stage the ball tends to have a spiral spin, as if it were a football. This is caused by having the hand in the wrong position, even though you might be using the correct wrist action, i.e. turning the doorknob.

HAND POSITION You get a spiral rotation by throwing the ball with the palm forward instead of rotating in away from the body. When this occurs you need to go back to the pendulum motion from a short distance to develop the habit of proper hand position. This is simply a matter of muscle memory through repetition.

STAGE 2. - SIDE SPIN

The second stage of development is usually a side spin on the ball which creates a curve pitch. This is a usable pitch in a game, but it is not a rise pitch.

WRIST ACTION What happens here is, the pitching hand is in the correct release position, but you apply the wrong wrist action. Instead of a clockwise rotation of the hand and wrist, you are snapping the wrist sideward, which imparts side spin on the ball.

To solve this problem, simply move in close again, go back to the pendulum action and continue until you master the correct wrist movement.

STAGE 3. - 3/4 RISE SPIN

FLAT RISE In this final development stage, you have accomplished the correct release position and wrist action, but neither is perfect yet. The ball has a backward rotation but tends to spin at an angle, which means the ball will lift and curve at the same time. Again this is a usable pitch, but it is not a pure rise ball.

To solve the problem and perfect the backward rotation, simply continue to practice, emphasizing wrist action and follow-through. I have found the wall drill described earlier, to be useful for putting the final touches on this pitch.

After eight or ten repetitions keeping the palm of the hand against the wall, you can almost always go back and throw the rise ball with close to perfect spin.

From this point on it is simply a matter of practice to perfect the technique, make it consistent and learn to control the location of the pitch, which should be at the upper corners of the strike zone.

So there it is! A step by step procedure to learn the rise ball and increase your pitching skills . Good luck and have some fun with this great softball pitch.