



Deceptive Pitching Qualities

by **DEREK JOHNSON**

In addition to sound mechanics, a blazing fastball, and a live arm, a pitcher must know how to pitch—what to throw, when to throw it, and where to locate it. He must have that unique blend of confidence and determination to set the tone of the game, own the mound, and shut down the opponent. In *The Complete Guide to Pitching* (Human Kinetics, 2013), new Chicago Cubs minor league pitching coordinator Derek Johnson takes you inside the art and science of pitching. Packed with high-quality photo sequences, the book includes a 60-minute DVD, making it the most comprehensive pitching resource available.

In this exclusive excerpt from chapter five of the *The Complete Guide to Pitching*, “Developing an Arsenal,” Johnson details the deceptive traits of the delivery that make each pitcher unique.

I've often heard hitters coming back to the dugout after an at-bat mumbling about not being able to “see” or “pick up” what the pitcher just threw to them. I can remember that feeling too when I was a hitter. However, I usually had trouble seeing most of the pitches that any pitcher threw to me, so I concluded that the problem wasn't so much the deception of the pitcher but instead my inabilities as a hitter! What is it about some pitchers that make it difficult for the hitters to pick up the ball out of their hands? What makes them deceptive?

Some pitchers simply “will” the ball to the plate. They have so much conviction in what they are throwing—they are so competitive and have such complete trust in what the ball is doing and where it is going—that they somehow seem to make batters miss even when they throw a terrible pitch. This pitcher is deceptive because of his “me versus you” attitude. Some people might say this pitcher is lucky. Others will say that he pitches with “smoke and mirrors.” I say he pitches with a great intent. With balls and strikes. With trust.

Some pitchers are deceptive because of their individual pitching style. Let's look at four disguises that a pitcher can use to hide the pitch.

Throwing Across the Body

The first deceptive quality that a pitcher can use is throwing across his body. You will see many relievers in the big leagues who throw across their body, possibly for the sole purpose of concealing their pitches (see figure 5.20). Although this may not be the most functional and efficient move toward the plate, throwing across one's body can create a disadvantage for the hitter because of the angle at which the pitch is thrown or because of the jerky motion the pitcher uses to rotate and throw the pitch. The pitcher must now determine whether the deception of stepping across his body outweighs the risk of injury or becomes a hindrance for creating more velocity. A general rule for me is that if the pitcher can throw the ball to his glove side and demonstrate the ability to rotate his back hip around the front hip while doing so, this indicates that he is able to completely finish the throw and can be allowed to continue throwing across his body. If he cannot show that he can do this, or if it is obvious that he could throw much harder or much more efficiently another way, I would then try to help him with his line to the plate.



Figure 5.20 This pitcher's delivery may hide the ball longer from the hitter because he is closed off to the plate, thus making it more difficult for the hitter to pick up the pitcher's release point.

High Glove Side

Another element of deception is the high glove side. Usually, a pitcher with an elevated glove side, as shown in figure 5.21, has the ability to hide the ball longer because the ball often appears to the hitter just after the glove side goes down, especially when the arm slot comes through the same pathway as the glove side. In a perfect world, setting the hip, is what elevates the front shoulder. If everything is on time and in rhythm, the elevated glove side creates leverage, angle, and deception for the pitcher.

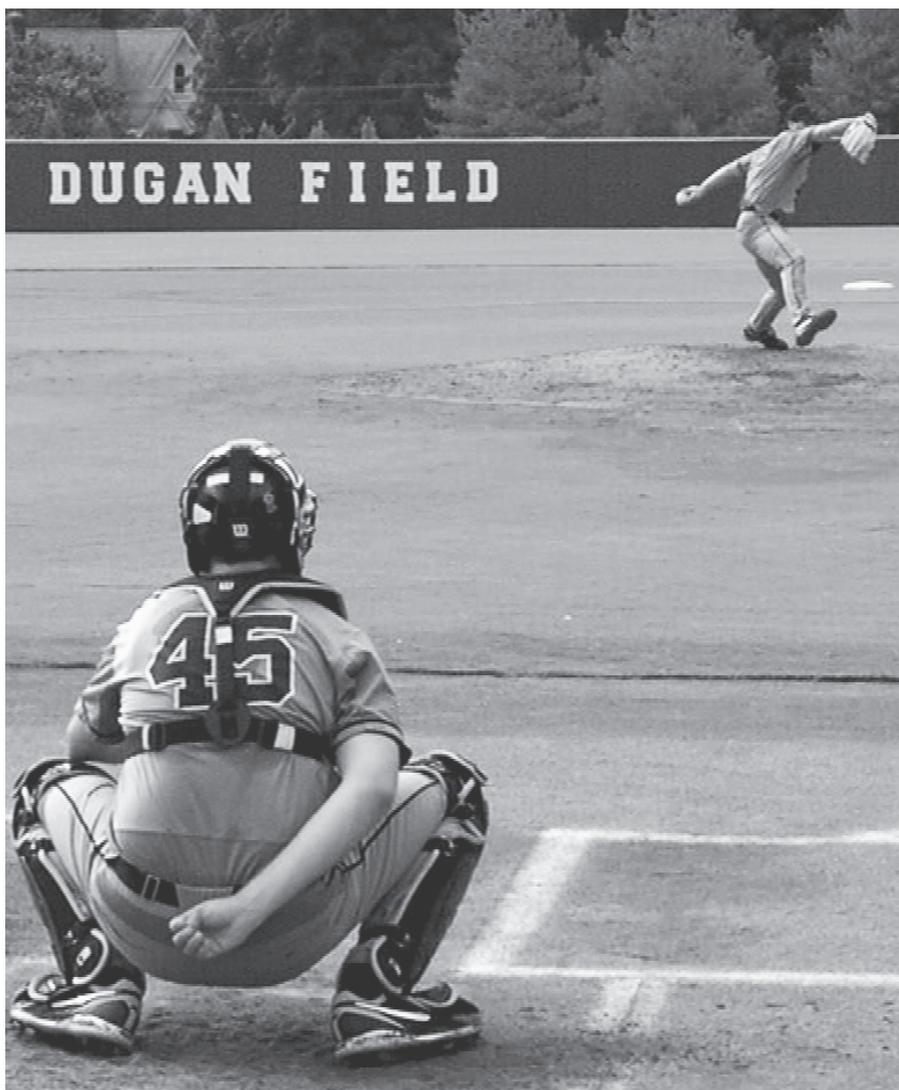


Figure 5.21 The elevated glove side not only increases the pitcher's leverage for working against the slope of the mound, it may also make it more difficult for the hitter to pick up the release of the ball.

Throwing Arm Direction

A third deceptive quality is the manner, or direction, in which the throwing arm moves. Usually, the arm swing that is most deceptive to the hitter is one that is directly behind, is shorter, and does not pause or stop. The pitcher's body shields the ball from the hitter, and the ball often appears to come out of nowhere or off the top of the shoulder. The pitcher doesn't give the hitter anything to look at, and the ball has the ability to sneak up on the hitter. These guys are tough to hit!

Angle and Slot Change

The final deceptive quality is a change of the angle and slot from where a pitcher normally throws the ball—this is the sidewinder. Some people in baseball circles would say that sidearm pitchers are more difficult to hit because their ball moves so much, but I would disagree. I think they are tough to hit because they have a swooping spine change at the end, and the ball comes from a much different place than the hitter is accustomed to seeing it. The deception of the sidewinder is that he is upright and then makes a drastic posture change, delivering the ball from a very odd and low angle—something the hitter is definitely not used to seeing. This, coupled with the movement of the ball and the unusually sweeping movement of the breaking ball, makes the sidewinder extremely deceptive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Derek Johnson, named college baseball's National Pitching Coach of the Year in 2004 and National Assistant Coach of the Year in 2010, is widely considered one of the top pitching coaches in the country. In October 2012, he accepted a position with the Chicago Cubs as their minor league pitching coordinator. Before his appointment with the Cubs he spent 11 years as pitching coach at Vanderbilt University. While at Vanderbilt, four of his last five staffs led the Southeastern Conference in earned-run average. More than 25 of Johnson's past pitchers have been drafted, including 2012 American League Cy Young Award-winner David Price, the number-one overall pick in the 2007 draft.

The Complete Guide to Pitching is now available in bookstores everywhere, as well as online at www.HumanKinetics.com. It is also available as an enhanced e-book edition with video, compatible with the iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, NOOK Color, and NOOK Tablet. Look for more from Derek Johnson in *Baseball The Magazine* throughout 2013.

