

JOE TORRE'S VIRTUAL BASEBALL ACADEMY

FEATURES:

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For Youth Players, Coaches, and Parents



torre's take

with Joe Torre

The Fastball

When throwing a fastball, some pitchers and youth coaches think that "harder and faster" is always better. And while there is much to be said about throwing pitches with speed, the most important element to learn at a younger age is proper mechanics. In fact, many players and coaches think that a fastball is all about speed, but it's just as much about control, accuracy and strategy. A pitcher who throws hard, but always misses the strike zone becomes a liability rather than a good contributor. Likewise, a pitcher who always throws strikes to the same spot at the same speed is going to get hit hard sooner or later.

Before we get to some of the nuances and strategy, however, let's get back to the basics. The bottom line is that proper technique for throwing a fastball will give you the ability to better spot your pitches, give you more endurance and reduce the chances of experiencing fatigue or even suffering an injury.

You should begin throwing any pitch the same way, so that as you progress and add additional pitches to your repertoire, you do not tip off the batter. So start with your toes pointed to the catcher and be in a balanced stance. Hold the ball in your glove with a 4-seam grip. (Screen #1) By holding the ball in your glove, you do not reveal the grip you are using, which can be an important clue for the batter. Keep your hands and your glove at or near the level of your chin and focus your eyes on the catcher's mitt. Focusing on your target throughout the wind up and pitch is really important and it also allows you to improve your hand-eye coordination. To become a good fastball pitcher, you must trust yourself to be able to throw to the correct spots.

The wind-up and preparation to pitch include several simple steps that initially could be mechanical to you. With a lot of repetition, these movements become simple, intuitive and flowing. In other words when you move past the "thinking" stage and get to the "doing" stage, you are going to be more successful. Start this sequence by taking a short step back with your glove-side foot. You take your opposite foot and square it to the catcher, planting it on the front side of the pitching rubber. (Screen #2)

Now your lower body movements will begin. You should lift your glove-side knee up, scraping your opposite knee. (Screen #3) Next, your hands should break and your throwing arm should swing back in the arc of a circle, with your fingers pointing downward. At the same time, your front knee should drop and your leg should stride forward. (Screen #4)

Now you make the throw. You should pull your throwing arm down and toward your target with your elbow in. This forces your glove-side shoulder down and toward 1st base (for a right-handed pitcher). Your throwing shoulder should end up pointing to the target and your eyes must continue to stay on the catcher's mitt.

To follow through, make sure you drive off your back foot and end up in a balanced, athletic position. (Screen #5). Since the pitcher plays a defensive position, it's important that you take on the role of a fielder as soon as you release the pitch. By ending in a balanced position, you are better able to field a ground ball, cover the plate on a passed ball, cover 1st base on a ball hit to the 1st baseman or handle a myriad of other possibilities.

As noted earlier, it's imperative to establish a comfortable and sound pattern of delivering pitches. The repetitions you perform will help move you from being a mechanical pitcher to one that is comfortable, aware and intuitive.

Remember that when throwing a fastball, try to refrain from trying to throw too hard. When you do this, your accuracy can suffer and your arm can tire quickly. Instead, focus on proper mechanics, pitching to locations and trying to keep the hitters off guard. By doing these things correctly and when supported by good coaching, your pitching should improve quickly.



Screen #1



Screen #2



Screen #3



Screen #4



Screen #5

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