

# 8 Basic Tips for Beginning Pitchers

By Coach Jorge Laureano

It's important to understand that each child's progress is unique, based on several factors. A child's development is first dictated by his age, level of concentration, physical growth and playing experience. Therefore, when it comes to pitching, each child should go at his own pace and not try to compare himself to his peers when learning how to pitch. The following tips are designed to help a child learn some basic steps about the art of pitching:

1. Before you begin, you must establish the distance between home plate and the pitching rubber. For Little Leaguers in the Majors and Minors division, the distance is 46ft. (check with your coach about the Rookie Division). Once you establish the distance, a pitcher begins warm up tosses to loosen up his arm gradually. When he's ready to pitch, the most important thing is the grip! A beginning pitcher should always hold the ball by the seams. He should always hold the ball the same way each and every time he throws the ball. A ball should never be held right up against the palm of your hand. When you hold the ball, there should always be a gap between your hand and the ball (See illustration #1). Your fingers should also be slightly spread apart (See illustration #2).



Illustration#1



Illustration#2

## Getting in a good balanced position:

2. Once you have a comfortable grip on the ball, the next step is to work on your pitching mechanics. Pitching mechanics is considered the foundation of pitching. Most right-handers will start on the right side of the rubber and most lefties start on the left side of the rubber. A good sound pitcher works on getting in good, controlled balance by using a short, start step so that they don't get out of balance. It's important to do it the same way each time so you feel a steady rhythm. A good thing to practice while in front of a mirror is to bring your lead leg up and hold your position so that you're standing on one leg. Your shoulders should be square and not hunched over. Once you reach your balance point, your shoulders should be lined between home plate and second base.

## **Your Landing:**

3. As the lift leg starts down, out of the balanced position, the hands should break apart in the middle of the body somewhere between the belly-button and the chest, fairly close but not up against the body. The throwing arm goes down out of the glove with the fingers on top of the ball and the thumb underneath. It should swing down and back but should not go to full extension straight back. The lift leg should land directly towards your target with your toes pointed straight in the direction of home plate. If your foot lands sideways, you're probably not landing properly and it forces you to compensate the arm angle to maintain a straight throw towards your intended target.

## **The Lead Arm:**

4. Your arms should be going in exactly the opposite direction of each other as you break for the plate. The important thing is for the pitcher to use his elbow almost as a sight so that when his lead foot lands his elbow and shoulder are lined up with home plate. Some pitchers point their glove hand at the target to help. This prevents the pitcher's shoulder from opening up too early, so he won't lose power and place unnecessary stress on the arm.

## **Keeping your body weight on the back leg:**

5. The most common loss of power comes when a pitcher rushes his throw and does not keep his body weight on the rear leg. The other important thing that has to happen, once the lead foot lands, is that the pitcher needs to stop his lower body from moving forward before his upper body begins rotating as it squares off going toward release. This is done by firming up his lead knee so that he doesn't drift forward. Many young pitchers let their knee continue to drift forward so the body has nothing to throw against. This causes more loss of power. As your lead leg starts to go down, your back leg should bend slightly to help keep the weight back.

## **Releasing the ball:**

6. This is actually the critical point. If the pitcher maintained his balance properly, now the next important area is the ball release point. Once your front leg has landed properly, your shoulders should be square, your glove hand begins to tuck under your armpit and your throwing arm should be coming over the top like a machine "handle". Your throwing elbow must form an "L" shape as it begins coming across. As you tuck your glove and your throwing hand is coming over, your hips should be turning to help provide power. The actual release of the ball should be done as if pretending to reach into the catcher's glove. Letting the ball go too soon causes a high throw.

## **Ending the windup:**

7. As you release the ball, your throwing shoulder should be pointed at your target, your front leg begins to straighten up and your eyes should be level. Your throwing hand should come across the opposite side of your body.

## **Fielding position:**

8. Last but not least, a pitcher is the 9<sup>th</sup> fielder on the team. Once you have successfully released the ball, you now become a fielder and prepare yourself for a ball hit in your direction.

Keep in mind that these are all just basic points to help correct pitching mechanics but they are not a substitute for an actual coach. Understanding pitching mechanics helps a pitcher avoid injury and sometimes, add power to your throw.