

THE SIX KEY STEPS IN PITCHING

THE SIX STEPS ARE

1. SMALL BACK STEP
2. BALANCE POSITION
3. CONTROLLED STRIDE
4. POWER POSITION
5. LEAD ARM
6. FOLLOW THRU

1. SMALL BACK STEP Our goal when pitching is to go in two directions: back and towards the plate. When a pitcher steps back to the side or takes a long step back, it is hard to obtain our goal. It is crucial at any age, that the pitcher understand that there will be no power acquired from taking a large back step from the pitching rubber. The only thing a large back step does is taking away from the pitchers balance and away from the intended direction of the throw. In order to remain balanced and gain power, the pitcher must take a small step directly back from the pitching rubber. The step length depends on the size of the pitcher. Take the step in a slow and controlled fashion. The ideal step will keep the pitchers head over the rubber to maintain balance.

Drill:

1. This drill can be done alone or have the pitchers work in groups of two.
Have the pitcher stand on the pitching rubber as he faces the catcher.
Begin the normal wind-up.
The partner holds a ball under the chin of the pitcher.

After the pitcher steps back, he pauses.
The partner then drops the ball from the pitcher's chin.
If the ball hits the pitcher's upper leg, he has taken too big of a step or has too much upper body movement.
The ideal result is having the ball hit the pitcher in the foot that is still placed on the pitching rubber.

2. BALANCE POSITION- Everyone that coaches baseball stresses the balance position. It is the most important part of the pitching motion. This is a crucial step, because this is right before the pitcher starts his momentum towards the plate. After the pitcher takes his small back step, he then pivots the foot touching the rubber (righty pitcher-it's his right foot: lefty pitcher-it's the left foot) a full 90°. The arch of his instep should be facing the catcher. The leg closest to the catcher will lift (under control) till the knee is as high as the hip. Do not let the knee swing backwards past the belly button! The leg should be parallel with the pitching rubber. The foot will be relaxed (don't flex the foot upward). At this time, the body will look like a lower case 'h'. To help with the balance, STRESS to keep the weight of the body on the back (pivot) foot. This will help the pitcher not fall towards the plate. The hands are relaxed, with the ball still in the glove, resting at the pitcher's chest. Focus on keeping the head over the center of the body. Do not lean the upper body backwards. In a game or throwing situation, this step only lasts approx. 1 second.

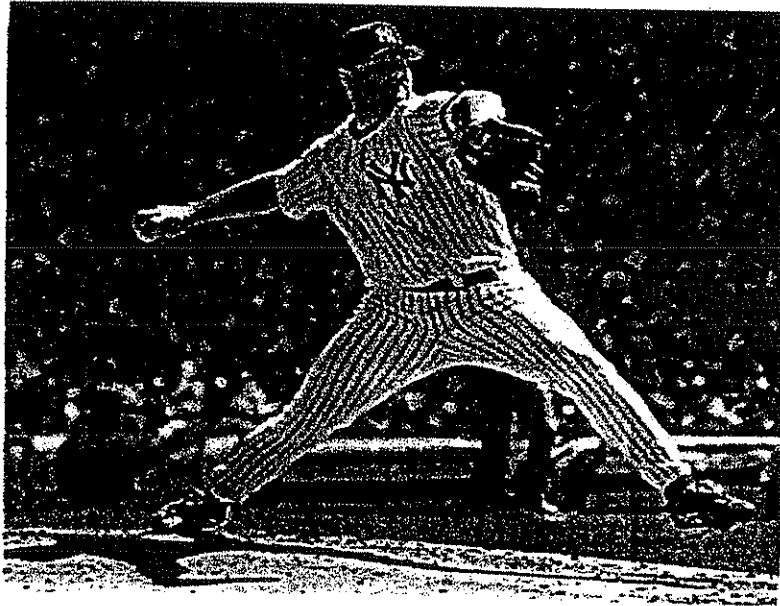


STEP 2 (BALANCE POSITION)

- Both pitchers bring their knee to at least the height of their hip
- Notice how the weight and their head is staying over their back foot
- Their hands are together at their chests
- The pitcher on the left demonstrates a relaxed foot (toes are pointing down)
- Their bodies are shaped like a lower case 'h'

- Drills:
1. Have the pitcher start at the set position.
Make sure shoulders and hips are in direct line to the catcher.
Lift lead leg to correct height and time how long the pitcher can hold this position.
Each time should get better, but it is not easy for the first few times!
 2. As the pitcher succeeds at the previous drill, you may now add a baseball.
Do the same drill as before, but when the pitcher gets to and holds his balance, hand him the baseball.
Then he may complete a throw.
Do this many times before moving on.
 3. Adding on to the previous drill.
Now have the pitcher start from the wind-up position.
Give the ball to the pitcher when he shows balance.
Complete the throw.
 4. Let the pitcher have the ball from the start.
Begin in the wind-up position.
At the balance position, pause for 2 seconds, then continue on with the throw.

3. CONTROLLED STRIDE- After the body is in balance, the pitcher begins his stride towards the plate. As the body is in the lower case 'h' shape, with the knee at the height of the waist, the pitcher will take the foot straight towards the ground. The foot's first movement is not towards the plate, rather straight to the ground. As it nears the ground, the foot begins its stride to the plate. We commonly remind our



STEP 3 (CONTROLLED STRIDE)

- Pitcher is striding straight to the plate
- His weight is staying back- near the back foot
- Front foot is low to the ground
- Hips and shoulders are still pointed to target
- Ready to get into Power Position

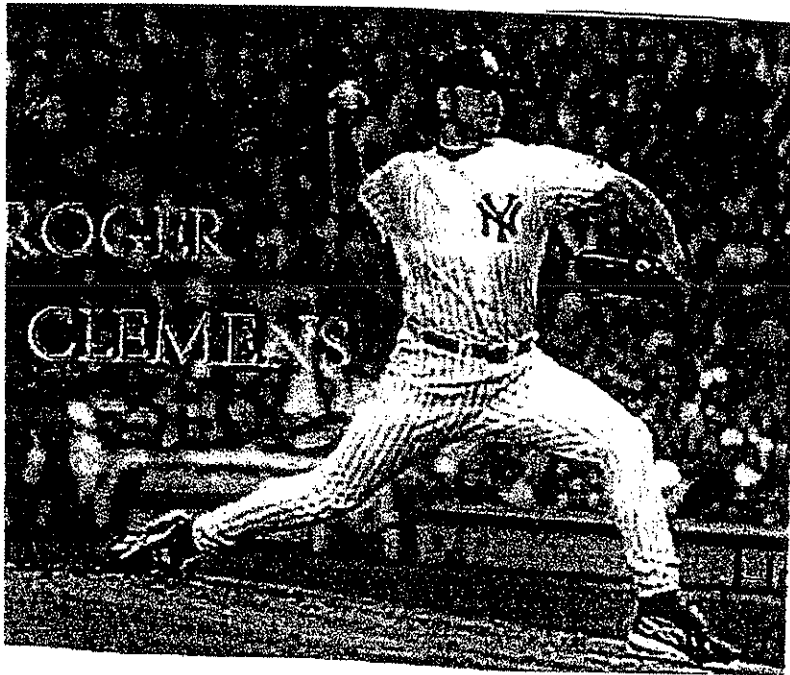
pitchers to go "Down and Out", referring to the way we would like them to stride.

Doing this movement, the pitcher keeps his weight on the back leg (the one connected to the pitching rubber), which will then transfer into power later. Concentrate doing this move in a straight line to the plate. Watch for stepping "open" or "closing themselves off." While this movement is occurring, the hands are starting to separate away from each other.

- Drills:
1. Put a 6 foot piece of tape on the floor, in a straight line to the plate. (Tape is perpendicular to the pitching rubber.)
Have the pitcher start in balance position, with arch of foot at center of the tape.
Practice lowering the foot straight down till a few inches from the ground, while keeping the head over the back foot. (Emphasize keeping the head over the back foot.)
Stride out, aiming for tape. (Once again, keep head on back foot throughout stride.)
 2. Add on to the previous drill.
As the pitcher masters the footwork, you may add the arms.
The hands start to separate as the feet separate.
This will lead into the power position.

4. POWER POSITION- This is approximately the half way point of the pitching delivery. It is at this point, that determines power and accuracy. This is the point when the front lead foot lands. Everything on the pitcher needs to be in a straight line to the catcher (shoulders, hips, ankles). These body parts need to be straight to the plate so the pitcher can gather and gain power and torque. The catcher should not be able to see the pitcher's chest. He will see just his lead arm and lead leg.

At this point, the pitchers weight is still on his back leg (try to keep head over the back foot for best results). The throwing arm is shaped



STEP 4 (POWER POSITION)

- Majority of pitcher's weight is still back
- Ball is facing away from the catcher
- Throwing elbow is getting to the height of the shoulder
- Starting to use rotation of the hips and shoulders
- Ready to use the lead arm (glove arm)

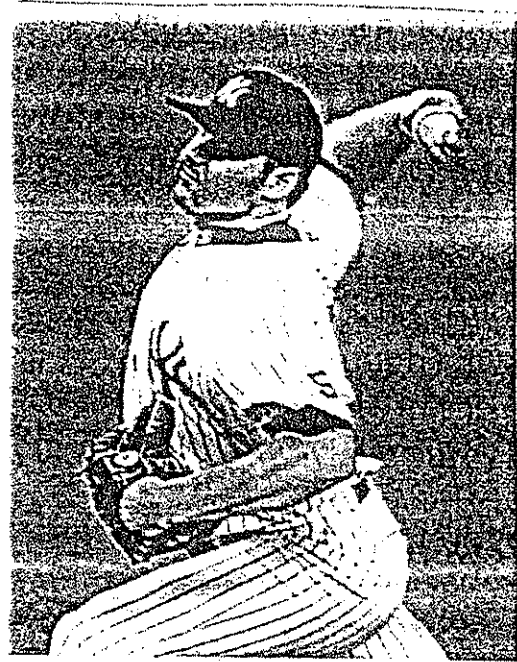
like an upper case 'L'. The ball should be facing away from the pitchers face (should be showing to the centerfielder). The throwing arm's elbow should be at shoulder height.

The glove-side arm (the guide arm) should have the elbow pointing to the catcher. The inside of the glove (the pocket) should be facing the catcher.

- Drills:
1. Stand in front of a mirror.
Practice from the balance position.
Do a controlled stride and freeze when the front foot lands.
Check to see where your body is.
Make corrections as needed.
 2. Stand in the power position.
Throw from that position at a shorter distance than the pitching mound.
Gradually make the distance further until actual pitching distance.
(This drill is not easy for young players.)

5. LEAD ARM- The lead arm (the non-throwing arm) is the most overlooked part of the throwing motion. However, it does more work than hold a glove. This arm will provide torque and enable you to turn quickly. The throwing arm and lead arm do counter actions. As the pitcher hits the power position, the lead arm is now ready to work. As the pitcher *pulls* the glove hand to his chest, the throwing hand is moving rapidly to the plate.

This is similar to a karate student. As a karate student punches with a right hand, the left hand is brought in to his chest. Many young pitchers do not use their lead arm properly. The pitcher needs to imagine that the glove hand is turning a door knob and pulling the door open towards him. This drives the lead elbow to the rib cage of the pitcher.



STEP 5 (LEAD ARM)

- Both pitchers are using their lead arm to their advantage.
- You can either tuck the glove into your chest or down slightly to your waist
- The common mistake is for pitchers to pull their lead arm away from their body.

- Drills:
1. With no glove or ball, have the pitcher start in the power position.
Practice (in slow motion) bringing the glove hand to his lower chest, while his throwing hand throws the baseball.
 2. With no glove, place two balls (if the pitchers hand is big enough) in the glove hand and one ball in throwing hand.
Start in the power position.
Make sure the glove hand balls are showing to the catcher.
Practice bringing glove hand balls to the chest as throwing arm throws.

6. FOLLOW THRU- "Bend your back!" That is the common phrase that most pitchers hear. Following thru is more than that. To obtain a healthy and long pitching career, the pitcher must constantly work on their follow thru. Emphasis needs to be placed on the back, the shoulder, and the pivot leg (righty's-right leg: lefty's-left leg). After the pitch, the pitchers chest should be parallel to the ground, which causes the back to be flat. Depending on an individual's flexibility, the degree will vary. The pivot leg will end up parallel with the leading foot. This enables a pitcher to field a ball and defend themselves from line drives.

- Drills:
1. Have the pitcher with his glove on and a ball in the throwing hand.
Stand in the power position.
Now kneel on the back knee.
Throw the ball (while incorporating the lead arm) and emphasize putting the chest on the front leg and hold it there.
Chest should be parallel to the ground.

2. Make the drill tougher.

Same situation, but do not kneel.

Get a chair.

Place back leg on the chair. (Lay the leg, from the knee down,

flat on the chair.)

Practice throwing-(incorporate the lead arm.)

Emphasize ending with the chest on the lead leg.

3. Put glove on and have ball in throwing hand.

Stand in the power position.

Put a bag, bucket, or some item in front of back foot.

Throw the ball.

Practice lifting the back leg, during throwing motion, over the item and ending up with it parallel to lead foot. (This drill stops the habit of dragging the back foot, causing a slower torque of the hips.)



STEP 6 (FOLLOW THRU)

- Follow thru starts at the point of the first picture
- The 2nd and 3rd pictures show how flat the back gets and his chest is resting on his front knee
- The pitcher is using his entire body to throw—not just his arm!
- Notice the back foot is not dragged. It is lifted up so there is nothing holding him back.
- The last picture shows how to have a controlled finish. Both feet are squared to the plate and he is ready to field his position.