

# Four Essential Skills of a Pitcher

Evaluating pitchers and determining which ones are ready for a chance to throw in a game can be challenging for the novice coach. You don't want to rush a young new pitcher to the mound and he have a bad experience; never wanting to get "back on the horse" again. While this is an important issue -- involving a whole range of things including grips, mechanics, and pickoff moves -- at the most basic level I decide whether a pitcher is ready to throw an inning in a real game based on whether they possess some essential skills as a pitcher...

## **1. Ability To Throw Strikes With A Batter In The Box**

Last year I learned the hard way that you shouldn't evaluate pitchers based on how well they throw when it's just them and the catcher. This is why part of pitching practice needs to consist of live-pitching to batters or in practice games. When in the Bullpen, create situations, different counts, have another player stand in to be a simulated batter. Anything to make practice more "game-like".

## **2. The Ability To Keep The Ball Down Consistently**

Once a guy has proven to me that he can throw strikes with a batter in the box, I then ask him to prove to me that he can keep the ball down consistently. I emphasize this skill for two reasons.

First, it reduces the number of passed balls because it's much easier for a catcher to block a ball that hits the ground in front of them. There's little a catcher can do if a guy is constantly throwing the ball to the backstop.

Second, your strategy should be for opponents to hit more ground balls. Lower pitches increase the likelihood of a ground ball, which increases the likelihood that your infield will be able to make the play. Make sure your pitching practice routine consists of throwing at spots, up/down, in/out so the pitcher learns the feelings of controlling his spots.

## **3. The Ability To Get Through A Simulated Inning**

Once a guy has proven to me that he can throw strikes while keeping the ball down, he has to prove to me that he can hold up under pressure. As I mentioned above, the pitchers need to throw a simulated inning with a (non-swinging) batter in the box. When judging these simulated innings, I am most interested in seeing whether they can throw multiple strikes in a row, whether they can throw strikes after falling behind in the count, and whether they can get batters out after walking a few guys. I also find that pitching simulated innings is good practice in general because it helps my

pitchers focus and concentrate in game-like conditions.

#### **4. Velocity**

Only after a guy has proven to me that he can throw strikes, keep the ball down, and get through a simulated inning do I worry about velocity. I like my guys to be able to put something on the ball, but I have learned from experience that velocity is entirely useless if a pitcher doesn't have control (Essential Number 1 and Essential Number 2) and is mostly useless if a pitcher can't hold up under pressure (Essential Number 3).

Whether you are a coach, an experienced pitcher or just a player that would like to try pitching, let the essentials above provide a start to your game plan of becoming better at your practice. It will transpire into your games.

Yours in Baseball,  
Coach Mike Jackson

***It's not where we are, it's where we are going  
It isn't what we have; it's what we do with it.***