

Top Ten List for New Softball Pitchers

What to do, when, and in what order...for pitchers ages 9 to15

by Gerald Warner, Softball Pitching Instructor



PHASE I

1. Throw a *minimum of 300 practice pitches each week* (400 would be okay, too). Practice...hard, serious practice is everything. Windmill pitching is not going to be easy. You need to build up to the point where you can throw 100 to 125 pitches every two or three days.

2. Master the mechanics of the pitch first...then speed.

Work on learning and developing proper mechanics. Then as you become more smooth and consistent with your motion, start adding speed. Do NOT worry about control right now...it will come later. Make certain you use: Consistent arm speed the whole way around; Arm extended (not bent) the whole way; Don't use only your arms and upper body to throw the ball...as your arm reaches your hip, bring your hip through with the pitch; Release the ball at your knee with the inside of the wrist straight ahead...facing home plate. Then follow-through...let your hand come up after the release, usually palm up, or whatever is natural to you. Get your speed consistently fast.

PHASE II - Control Your Pitch & Yourself

3. Throw at least 400 practice pitches each week (500 is okay, too).

4. Develop control.

You can develop good control ONLY if you can control yourself. Stay in your own head...whether in practice or in a real game situation...don't get distracted. Don't worry about a bad pitch, or fans or teammates yelling, or the umpire's call. Don't complain, whine, or make bad facial expressions. You MUST keep control...and show everyone else that you are the one in control. YOU run the game.

Then, after you get a smooth, comfortable roundhouse pitch and with good speed, and after you really feel and look confident, then start working on accuracy and placement of your pitches. Use the "4 corners": low and inside, low and outside, high and inside, and high and outside.

5. Develop a GOOD change-up pitch...then use it.

The speed of the change-up should be about $\frac{3}{4}$ the speed of your fastball...about 12-15 miles per hour slower. Grip the ball far back in your hand. There are several ways to throw a change-up (stiff wrist, circle change, back of hand, etc.) each with your normal motion and arm speed. The key is to have no wrist snap...keep your wrist locked. The idea is to not let the batter know the ball will be coming in slower. Your facial expression and your windmill delivery need to look exactly the same as your fastball. Make certain your coach and your catcher don't always call the change-up only when you have two strikes on the batter. Mix up your pitches...sometimes use the change-up on the first pitch... sometimes on a 2-ball, 1-strike count, etc.

Count on a minimum of 6 months to learn to throw a deceptive change-up ANY new pitch you learn (a change-up, drop ball, screwball, curve, rise ball, etc.) might each take up to 10,000 pitches before you get used to it. Be patient. Work hard to make each pitch work the way it supposed to.

PHASE III - After all of Phase II is done

6. Develop a drop ball...then work on it to make it *really* drop.

You need to make it have a fast and perfect top-to-bottom spin as it goes toward the plate. There are two common styles:

PEEL DROP - Throw it like your fastball, but roll it or snap it up, off the tips of your fingers, to create a bottom-to-top spin,

OR

ROLL-OVER DROP - Release the ball by "snapping it over" to create the bottom-to-top spin. A good drop ball can be very effective because it drops below the batter's bat, making her either hit only the top of the ball for a grounder, or hopefully, swing totally over the ball.

Both the "peel" or the "roll-over" style of drop ball are more effective if you keep your upper body weight forward (without bending at the waist ...directly over the stride foot at the time of release. This is seen by many pitchers as "being on top of the ball" and gives a greater opportunity to give the ball a fast forward spin when thrown.

7. Off Speed Pitch

In many pitchers' cases the "rollover" style drop ball will be approximately 6 to 8 miles an hour slower than the fastball, and therefore is a combined drop/off-speed pitch. You need something between the speed of your fastball and your change-up. Just like with the change-up, no batter or opposing coach should be able to tell when you are throwing it.

8. Make certain your pitches all look the same.

A batter should not be able to tell what kind of pitch you are going to throw. Keep your grip hidden by your glove. Don't show your grip until you start your backswing. Don't "telegraph" which pitch you are going to throw by using a certain facial expression or a different motion.

PHASE IV (don't go too fast...this phase is *years* away)

9. To gain confidence, throw 600 (or more) pitches per week.

Never let more than 2 days go by without practicing. Practice alone doesn't make perfect.

Perfect practice makes perfect. Work to make your last pitch better. **ALWAYS** work hard to improve the pitches you have learned. Learn to stay cool and always show that **YOU** are in control. Never let them see you sweat!

10. Learn one *more* pitch (that works)...a curve, screwball, or rise.

A **curve ball** can be effective if it is really deceptive, and really curves. The primary problem with a curve is that it is thrown on the same level as the batter swings. Even if it curves a little, it is still "hittable."

A **screwball** is a pitch that curves **IN** on a right-handed batter...it looks like it is coming across the plate...then it moves in toward the batter's hands. It **IS** possible to throw a screwball that also rises.

A good **rise ball** *can* be your most effective pitch...*provided* you can get it to work every time. Thrown right, it will rise just before it gets to the plate, forcing the batter to swing under it...popping it up, or missing it altogether. **If it doesn't work right**, the ball levels out chest-high, and you will give the batter a fat pitch up in her power zone. Even many college pitchers still cannot throw a good rise that works consistently. It will take a lot of practice...many months...to develop a good, effective rise ball.



If you have questions or would like more information, E-mail us at gw@pitchsoftball.com

or call Pitching Instructor Gerald Warner in Colorado at (720) 200-4575