



PITCHING GRIPS

101



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Pitching Grips 101

Welcome to Ultimate Pitching Grips! In this report, we are going to look at how to grip and throw a number of popular, effective pitches, everywhere from the four seam fastball to the slurve.

The number one thing to remember when throwing any of these pitches, is that the goal is to start the hitters bat. A lot of pitchers are scared of making contact with the bat, when in reality, 63% of fairly batted balls result in an out in the *majors*! If we get the batter to start the bat, we eliminate the chance of a ball, and have the opportunity to get a strike from a missed swing or a foul ball.

It's also a good idea for every pitcher to start off trying to develop the classic fastball, changeup and breaking ball repertoire. While we cover quite a few different kinds of breaking ball in this guide, trying to add more than one to a pitcher's repertoire, especially at a younger age, is a very bad idea. This is because a pitcher needs to be throwing a pitch at least 15% of the time in a game to develop and maintain command, and there aren't enough pitches in a game to work two breaking balls. What usually ends up happening is a pitcher takes two into the game, and only one ends up working.

And if a pitcher can't develop any breaking ball pitches to have some real bite and power to it, then the pitcher might have to use a breaking ball as another contrast pitch like the changeup – you have to work with the ability of the pitcher.

When it comes to mechanics, all pitches should be the same up until you reach the power position (Figure 1.1). From there all that will change is the angle at which the arm comes forward and the grip of the ball. Make sure your pitchers aren't *trying* to make spin happen – trust the grip and the arm action, and the ball will take care of the rest.

Every pitcher is going to have days with where they'll be average, good or exceptional. One great way to help maintain confidence over a long baseball season, is that when a pitcher has a day where they're exceptional with the fastball, curveball, or anything else in their repertoire,. right after the game, tell them to get a ball, get the grip that they had that day, take a marking pen, and outline their grip on the ball, put the date and the type of pitch on it and put it in their locker.

Because over a long season, there are going to be times when they lose the feel for certain pitches, and when they can come back and take that ball that where they had they had that exceptional day, they'll have a flashback and remember that they've done it before, and that they can do it again. **Now let's get started!**

The 4 Seam Fastball

Breakdown: The 4 seam fastball is your basic fastball, and the first pitch you would typically teach a young pitcher.

It's also the most important pitch in almost every pitcher's repertoire, and it's vital that a young pitcher learns to throw it high, low, inside and outside.

It's called the 4 seam fastball because it is held across the wide seams, meaning all four seams will be rotating towards the plate.

Grip: With his index and middle fingers running across the wide seams, the pitcher can point the horseshoe of the ball either inside or outside – it doesn't make a difference, and is purely up to pitcher preference. It does make a difference however how far apart the fingers are and how deep the ball is.

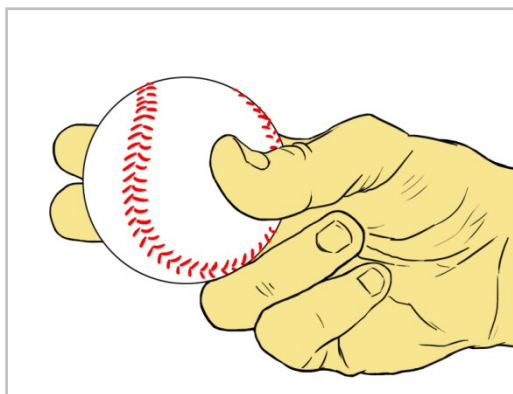
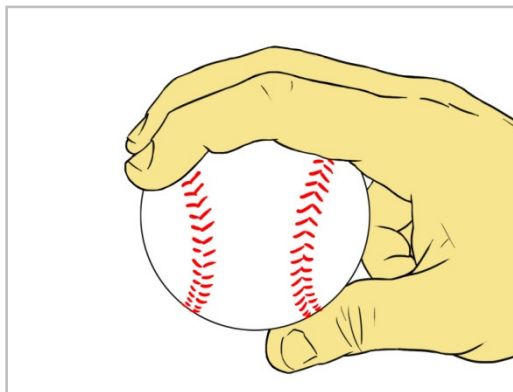
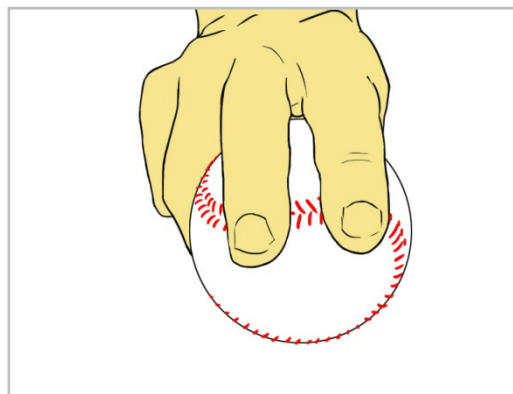
We want the fingers fairly close together – whether that's touching or just a slight spread is again up to pitcher preference. However we want to make sure the fingers aren't spread too far apart, as this will put unnecessary tension on the forearm, slowing down our arm speed.

We also want to make sure this, or any other fastball for that matter, is thrown out in the hand. Choking up on the ball will increase resistance, thus decreasing spin, and therefore velocity.

The thumb underneath the ball should be placed underneath the index and middle fingers, with most players preferring to rest the side of the thumb against the seam.

The pitcher does have some flexibility here with his thumb placement. Tucking the thumb in, closer to the rest of the hand will decrease resistance on the ball, while pushing the thumb farther out will increase the amount of movement.

4 Seam Fastball



Advantages: The greatest value of the 4 seam fastball is the increased velocity. It's also a fairly easy pitch to throw accurately, as there is very little movement, meaning the pitcher won't have to adjust and allow for the movement of the pitch.

Disadvantages: The lack of movement can make it easier for the hitter to locate and read correctly. Also, the faster a pitch is travelling, the faster it can come off the bat – so vary your location, or the batter will be able to hit the ball deep and with heat.

Coaching Tips: This is the pitch a pitcher would throw when they need a strike. Great pitch to throw high, outside of the effective contact zone, but in the zone where a batter will be tempted to chase, especially with the slight rising action.

The 2 Seam Fastball (With the Seam)

Breakdown: The 2 seam fastball with the seam has the same mechanics as the 4 seam fastball, just with an adjustment in grip that will create a tailing away action.

Grip: The pitcher will place his index and middle fingers along the narrow seams, at the top of the horseshoe.

The fingers and thumb have the same range of motion available to them as with the 4 seam fastball – we don't want the index and middle finger too far apart, and the thumb can be anywhere from tucked inside or placed outside.

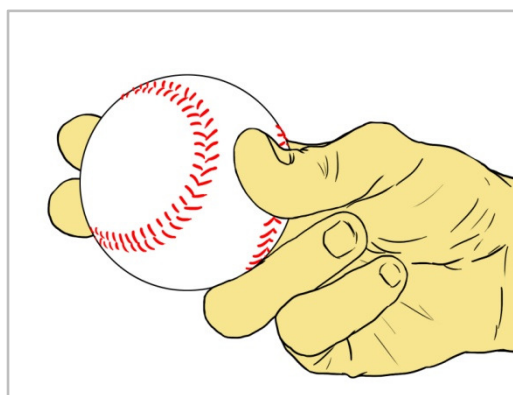
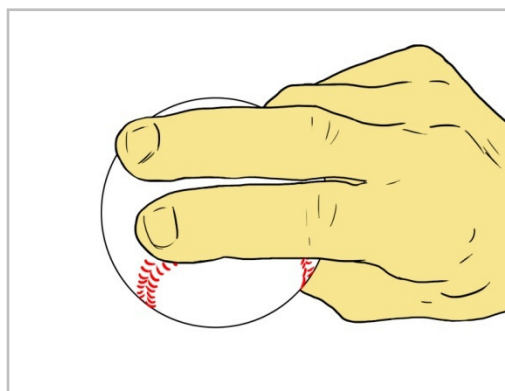
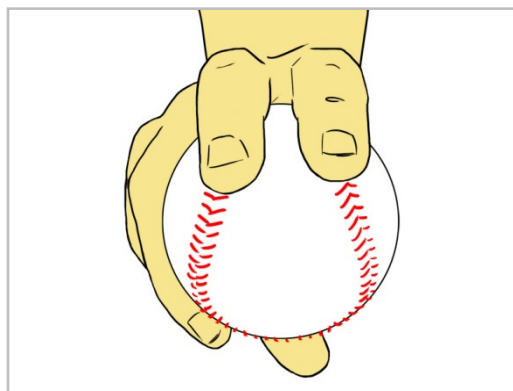
Advantages: This pitch is more likely to create groundballs than the four seam fastball, and the extra movement can make it tougher to locate than the 4 seamer.

Disadvantages: With the same arm speed and effort as a 4 seam fastball, the 2 seam along the seams fastball will not generate the same velocity as its 4 seamed counterpart.

Coaching Tips: This is a great pitch to throw low and inside against a right handed pitcher, and that same location can be equally as effective on a two strike count against a left hander.

Low and away from the arm side is another great location against a right hander, with the batter assuming the pitch will be a ball until it tails back in over the plate as it crosses the strike zone.

2 Seam Fastball (With The Seam)



The 2 Seam Fastball (Across the Seam)

Breakdown: A third and final fastball variation. Again we have an adjustment of the grip, but there is also a slight adjustment to the mechanics for this pitch as well.

Grip & Mechanics: Start by taking the two seam "with the seams" grip described above, then rotate the ball to either the left or right until the fingers are across the two narrow seams. This pitch has an arm action that bears some similarities to the changeup, in that we want to keep the wrist slightly stiffer and stay inside the ball through the pitch.

Advantages: Of the three fastballs we're covering here, the 2 seam fastball across the seams generates the most movement, with good movement on two planes – down and away. This makes this pitch ideal for trying to get a double play ball, or any situation where the infield has moved up, as it is great at producing ground balls.

Disadvantages: The tradeoff for the increased movement however is a further decrease in velocity, and an increase in degree of difficulty, as the pitcher will have to allow for movement on two planes. For most pitchers, this will be the slowest of the three fastballs.

Coaching Tips: To increase the sinking action, slide the fingers over a little bit more inside the ball.

The Change-up

Breakdown: The second most important pitch for a pitcher to develop is the changeup. It's a contrast pitch – meaning it's used to disrupt a hitter's timing once they've grown accustomed to seeing power pitches.

It also should have a little bit of movement, trailing off down and to the arm side. Everyone throws the changeup a little different, which can make it tough for a young pitcher to figure out exactly what they need to do to throw it effectively.

That's because the effectiveness of the changeup is entirely reliant on how the hitter reacts to it. If the hitter is right on it, able to make contact without adjusting his timing, then it's too fast.

If the batter can double clutch and still hit it, or has the time to recognize the pitch and take it, then it's too slow.

Remember, the goal is to start the hitter's bat - that's how we get outs.

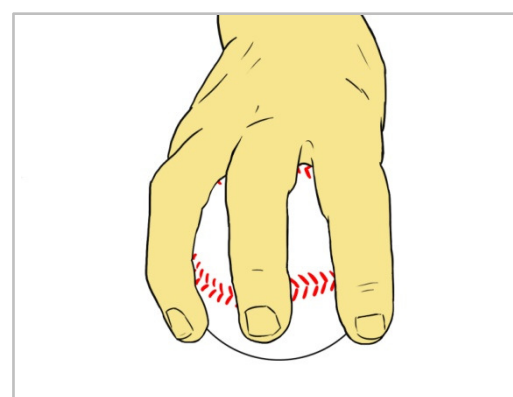
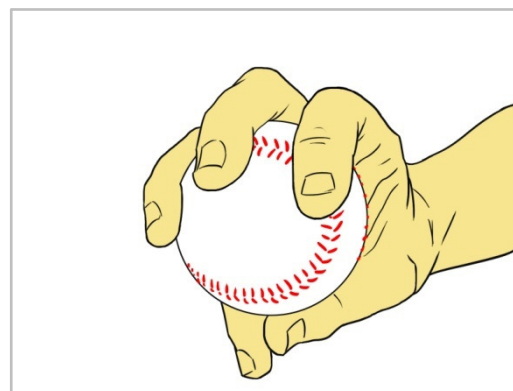
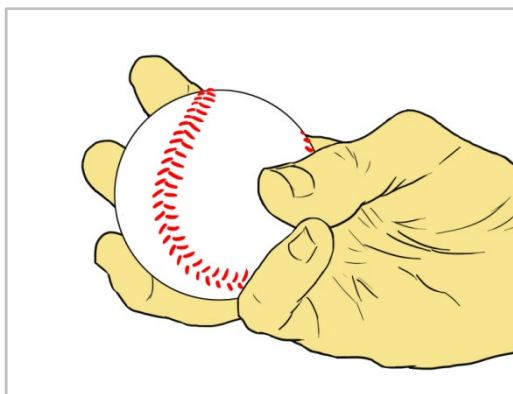
Grip & Mechanics: The changeup is a pitch that a pitcher will need to experiment with, as there are a large number of grips available to choose from.

But no matter the grip the pitcher ends up choosing, he'll be throwing the ball back, inside of the ball.

For starters, they can use any of the grips from the three different fastballs – but just with a looser, deeper grip.

If this isn't enough to slow the pitch down, there are two other grips that have become very popular as well: the three finger change and the circle change.

Three Finger Changeup



The three-finger changeup grip is great for younger baseball pitchers – especially kids with smaller hands.

The pitcher should center his ring, middle, and index fingers on top of the ball. The thumb and pinky finger should be placed on the smooth leather directly underneath the baseball.

The circle change is perhaps the most popular alternative to the classic changeup grip. To use it, make a circle with the thumb and index finger on the inside of the ball.

The ball should sit in the inside of the hand, coming off the outside of the hand on its way to the plate.

The narrow seams should be inside the circle so that it's thrown with 4 seam rotation, creating more spin. This will create an optical illusion that the ball is smaller.

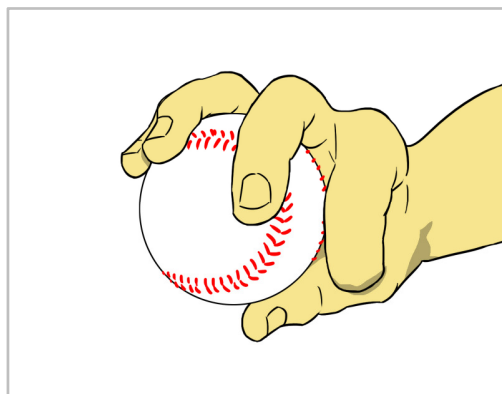
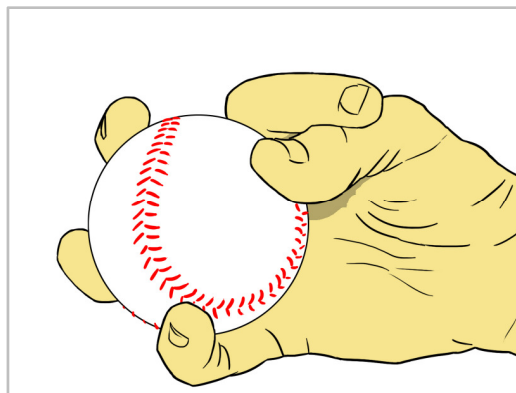
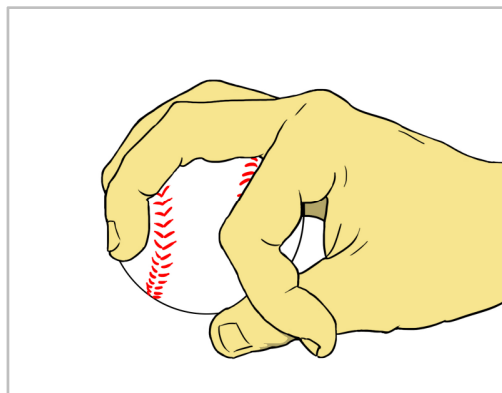
Regardless of the grip, it's important the pitcher remember not to try and turn the pitch over to create the spin, as this will cause stress in the arm that can lead to injury.

Regardless of the grip, it's important the pitcher remember not to try and turn the pitch over to create the spin, as this will cause stress in the arm that can lead to injury.

Also, the closer this pitch is to the fastball mechanically, the better. It should have the same release point, arm speed, and extension, but where we would finish with our palm almost facing up after a fastball, we want to finish more with our palm out, facing the arm side, after the changeup.

Advantages: When used properly and thrown effectively, the changeup will absolutely destroy the hitters timing – which is one of the primary goals of any good pitcher. It also makes the fastball seem even faster to the batter, as they can't time the pitch the same way they would if

Circle Changeup



that was all the pitcher was throwing. And lastly, it's also a pitch that is really easy on the arm, because the arm naturally pronates in this throwing motion.

Disadvantages: If the batter knows the changeup is coming and is able to time it correctly, it can be hit very hard, especially if it's up in the zone.

Coaching Tips: Don't let your pitchers get caught up in miles per hour when throwing the changeup. A good rule of thumb is that it should be about a foot slower than their fastball.

You don't need to have just one changeup either – some pitchers can develop two to three levels of changeup, from slow, to slower and slowest. This is more important for an off speed pitcher, who throws breaking balls and changeups for strikes. If that's the case, then the fastball would become the contrast pitch. Either way, the goal is the same - were trying to destroy timing.

12-6 Curveball

Breakdown: There are a number of different breaking balls that a pitcher can throw, but there are a couple important things that they all must possess to be an effective pitch.

For one, it needs to be a power pitch – it should break late, hard, and down, or down and across.

It should be thrown with the same arm speed as a fastball, forcing the hitter to react initially like it is a fastball – resulting in them either buckling their swing or just swinging right over top. To achieve this, the only thing we change is grip, and the part of the ball we throw.

Grip & Mechanics: The 12-6 curve is named for its break's motion as plotted against the face of a clock, i.e., "twelve o'clock to six o'clock" (straight down).

Whereas with the fastball we throw the back of the ball, coming from outside a bit, and the change up we throw more of the back and inside of the ball, with the breaking ball, we want to throw the **front** of the ball, creating top spin.

The throwing motion is something akin to a karate chop, going straight up and down from the power position, and the finishing position will actually be very similar to that of the fastball, with the palm up at the end.

The only difference is that we want it to be much shorter, as the pitcher should be pulling down hard and inside on the release to create that top spin.

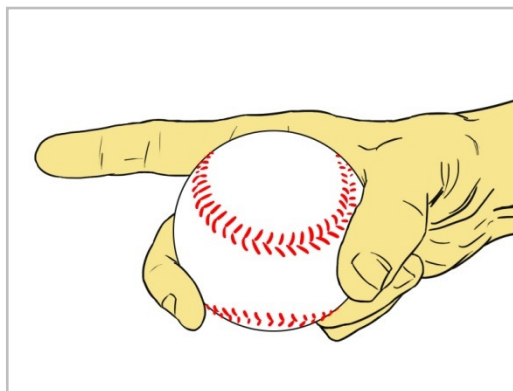
When it comes to grip, there are 3 main options.

The beginner's curveball is a great option to young players who are learning the pitch for the first time, because it's easier to get the proper 12-6 spin while maintaining control.

The player will place his middle finger along the bottom seam of the baseball and his thumb on the back seam.

The index finger is raised up off the ball without contact.

Beginner's Curveball and Slurve



For experienced pitchers desiring a faster spin and a harder break, **the straight curveball** grip is very widely used.

Place the middle finger on the seam on the right side of the top horseshoe (vice versa for lefties).

The index finger is aligned alongside the index but with minimal pressure. The thumb is placed underneath the ball on the back seam.

The spike curve, sometimes known as the knuckle curve, can lead to a sharper and later break, and is generally recommended only for advanced pitchers.

It is thrown the exact same way as the straight curveball, but with the index finger bent so that the knuckle or fingertip is on the ball.

This allows more pressure on the middle finger and more pulling action on the extension.

Advantages: Since the spin is happening on the same axis as the four seam fastball, to the batter, these pitches look nearly identical, which can make the drop at the plate all that more surprising to the batter.

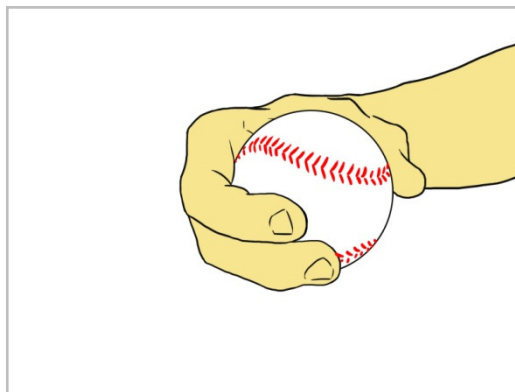
And just like the fastball, this is a pitch that will be equally effective against left and right handed pitchers.

Disadvantages: Because of the speed at which this pitch breaks, it can be very hard to throw for a strike, as the pitcher will need to hit the proper release point exactly or it will be thrown for a ball. It also can sometimes have a tendency to go straight up out of pitchers hand, giving the batter a chance to read the trajectory of the ball.

Coaching Tips: Make sure the pitcher isn't trying to throw the pitch like a fastball from the power position and then try to change directions at the last minute – all this will do is slow down their hand speed and put extra strain on their throwing arm.

It's the same thing with the pitcher trying to curve the ball with their hand – they need to trust their grip and their throwing motion and let the curve happen on it's on. If the ball is coming

Straight Curveball and Slurve



Spike Curveball and Slurve



out high out of the hand, the pitcher needs to adjust their elbow as it is probably not high enough. And if the ball is hitting the dirt, the pitcher isn't reaching out enough.

Slurve

Breakdown: A pitch that's very similar to the 12-6 curve, with an adjustment in angle that changes the axis of rotation closer to 1-7 or 2-8 – breaking hard down and across instead of just down.

Grip& Mechanics: The grip options remain the same as the curveball, with the beginner, straight, and knuckle curve grips being appropriate for different skill levels.

The change with this pitch is that instead of coming straight up and down with the karate chop, like in the 12-6 curve, we need to adjust to a three quarter angle so that we can throw the front *and* outside of the ball.

To explain this best to a pitcher, have them imagine that they're pitching through a doorway. As they come from the power position, they're going to throw from the upper right hand corner of the doorway down to the bottom left corner. For a left hand pitcher, it would just be the opposite.

They should be cutting off the outside of the plate with the side of the hand, maintaining the same hand speed and arm slot, just with a difference in angle at the point of release.

Advantages: Because of the angle at which the pitch comes across the plate, the pitch gives you 17 inches of plate to work with - even though you don't really want to throw this pitch to the arm side - making it easier to throw strikes, and allowing for a wider variety of release points. It will also break a little quicker than the 12-6 curveball, and is at its most effective against right handers, as it can cause them to buckle and flinch because they think ball is coming right at them until it breaks back across the plate.

Disadvantages: Against a lefty, since the pitch is breaking into their swing, it limits the effective locations. As long as it's kept short, quick, down and in, trying to wrap it around the lefties back leg, it will still be an effective pitch, but up high or over the middle of the plate it can be hit with power.

Coaching Tips: With either the 12-6 curve or the slurve, it's important the elbow stay up and forward. If you have a pitcher who tends to let the elbow slide out, have them imagine hammering in a nail with both their elbow in and out and notice the difference in power.

Also, unless the pitcher has incredible command of this pitch, we don't want them to get too fancy, and try to throw it backdoor against a lefty, as this can hurt their command and consistency.

Cutter(Cut Fastball)

Breakdown: The cutter, or cut fastball, is a great pitch for a pitcher with high velocity that can't get the hang of the breaking ball, as its only slightly slower than the four seam fastball and with good movement.

When thrown correctly the pitch should give short, quick, late movement, roughly 4 inches across and 3-4 inches down.

Grip & Mechanics: The cutter will come out very similarly to the fastball, but where the pitcher would release the fastball, with the cutter, they will continue over the ball, throwing the top of the ball and almost hooking the pitch. To do this the pitcher will need to resist the pronation inside and stay over the ball.

The two most effective cut fastball grips are variations on the four seam and two seam fastball grips. For the four seam variation, we just take the standard four seam fastball grip, and just slide the fingers over to the horseshoe.

When throwing the two seam variation, we take the two seam grip and just rotate the ball a quarter of a turn to where they're in line with the horseshoe, so that they've diagonally intercepted the two seams, with their middle finger on the ball and the thumb resting on the seam underneath.

Regardless of the grip the pitcher ends up using, ideally, we want them to get four seams rotating, to increase the rotation and the quickness of the break.

Advantages: A great way to keep batters from zoning in on your fastball, and with the late hard movement can be very difficult for a batter to get solid contact with.

4 Seam Cut Fastball



2 Seam Cut Fastball



Disadvantages: Can be very uncomfortable for some pitchers to throw, and can lead to arm fatigue if used too frequently.

Coaching Tips: Don't try and create spin and come around the ball – trust the grip and the hand speed. If the pitcher tries to create spin it will flatten the cut out too much, slowing it down and taking away the depth that we want with the movement across two planes. Location is important with this pitch - do your best to throw it down and away.

Splitter (Split Finger Fastball)

Breakdown: The splitter is effective for many of the same reasons as the changeup, as it's a great contrast pitch to use to keep hitters from keying in on your fastball. With a sudden drop at the plate and a similar motion to the fastball, it can be very tough for hitters to make sound contact with.

Grip & Mechanics: For the split finger fastball grip, we take a two seam fastball and just keep splitting the fingers. It should have as little thumb involvement as possible, as holding too tight with the thumb will create unnecessary tension in the wrist – so it's best to rest it on the back seam.

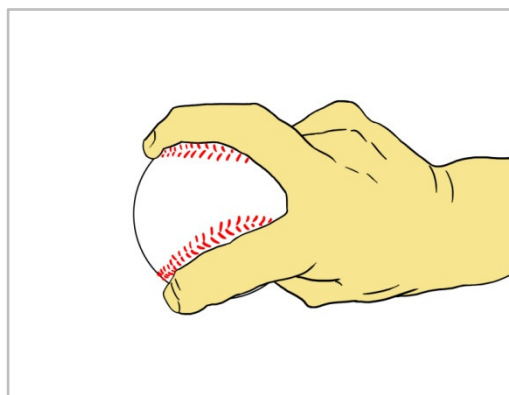
The amount of split is going to vary from pitcher to pitcher, but the important thing is that it comes up to the plate looking like a fastball, loses velocity, and drops.

It will take a little bit of playing around with the grip before the pitcher gets the hang of it - if it comes out and it doesn't do anything, they need to spread the fingers further dig the ball back a little deeper.

It's thrown with the exact same motion as the cut fastball, staying over the ball with the fingers and resisting the pronation so that it comes out with back spin and has a short quick drop at the plate.

Advantages: Another pitch that is great at producing ground balls, and can be a great double play ball.

Split Finger Fastball



Disadvantages: Can be tougher for pitchers with shorter, less flexible fingers or small hands to throw effectively.

Coaching Tips: While the amount of split will vary from pitcher to pitcher, it's important that at least one finger is in contact with the seam, as this is what enables the pitcher to control the ball at the point of release.

Knuckle Fastball

Breakdown: The four seam knuckle fastball is very similar to the splitter, as they both come up to the plate with fastball trajectory, then drop at the plate.

Grip & Mechanics: This pitch is thrown exactly the same as the fastball, just with a hard knuckle grip. The pitcher will take the four seam fastball grip, and place their index and middle finger knuckles along the back seam. Some pitchers prefer to use just the index finger knuckle, with the middle finger resting across the seams – it's just a personal preference.

Advantages: Like the splitter, the sudden drop at the plate makes it very difficult for a batter to get underneath, and leads to plenty of ground balls.

Disadvantages: Requires good flexibility in the knuckles, and is much more effective with fingers long enough that the pitcher can dig their fingertips in on the back of the ball, using the thumb for balance. Most young pitchers will have to lay their entire knuckles flat against the ball, which can make it very tough to throw with any velocity.

Coaching Tips: You're not necessarily pushing with knuckles, just letting it come out with that hard knuckle ball grip,

Developmental Drills

The following drills are great for working on improving specific pitchers, but the number one way to get better with any pitch is to throw it as much as possible. One of the best ways is to play meaningful catch with a partner – set up anywhere from 30-60 feet apart from each other and work on technique and command, focusing on hitting targets.

While this obviously wouldn't be a good idea for working on fastballs, it's extremely effective when working on the change up – especially if they work on throwing from 70-75 feet. This forces the pitcher to maintain arm speed from distance, and with each incremental move forward, command will increase.

When working the breaking ball however, regardless of whether it's catch or a drill in the bullpen, it's a good idea to keep the range on the shorter end of things, closer to 30 feet, to reduce stress on the arm.

Other than meaningful catch, there are a couple other drills that are especially effective at helping pitchers understanding the proper technique behind throwing an effective changeup or breaking ball.

These drills will be marked with one of a degree of difficulty, then explained with step by step instructions and several images to use as reference. You'll learn what each drill is trying to improve, how to set up and execute them, as well as some specific coaching tips to help get the most out of the drill, and your players.

Double Ball Drill

Difficulty Level: Beginner

Setup: This drill requires a pitching aid called a Double Ball. To make one, pre-drill a hole into two standard baseballs. Then, take a 6 inch wood screw and screw them together.

Before drilling, make sure the seams of the ball are oriented in a way that allows you to use your preferred breaking ball and changeup grips.

Purpose: To help pitchers feel and see the break on a breaking ball, and to help pitchers learn to stay inside and



Using the double ball to work on the breaking ball.

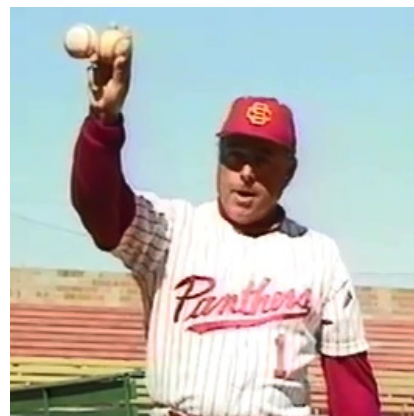
finish palm out on the changeup.

Execution: The double ball drill is just as effective at developing the changeup as it is the breaking ball. This is because the extra weight can help the pitcher understand the axis of rotation they're trying to create during the pitch, and the second ball makes it much easier to read the rotation once the pitch is out of hand.

When working on the breaking ball, the pitcher should hold the outside ball, and focus on throwing the outside of the ball, trying to get the 1-7 type spin.

When throwing the changeup, the pitcher should hold the inside ball, with the emphasis on staying inside and finishing palm out.

Coaching Tips: Remember that when working on the breaking ball, we want to keep the distance short, to reduce the strain on the arm, especially when we're using this double ball.



Using the double ball to work on the change up.

Softball Drill

Difficulty Level: Beginner

Setup: You'll need a pitcher, a softball, and a partner.

Purpose: To help pitchers get the feel for throwing breaking pitches, especially good for improving the 12-6 curve, the slurve, and the cut fastball.

Execution: Have the pitcher start off with the ball out of the glove in the power position, eliminating the stride. From there they will simply throw the pitch they're working on to their partner over and over until they feel comfortable with it.

From there, they'll start with the ball in the glove, load up on the backside, and repeat the same action.



Figure 1.2: Throwing the softball from the power position.

The next step is to do the exact same drill with the hardball. Then start from balance position, and work on the pitch from there, with the next step after that being a pitch from stretch or their normal ready position.

Coaching Tips: It's important that the pitcher remember to throw with fastball hand speed, regardless of the ball they're using.

The advantage to working with a softball at the beginning is that because of the kinetic feel and visual effect it can be easier to get the hang of getting the correct spin on the ball. Not to mention that because it's bigger, there's more air resistance against it, and initially, the ball will break much harder than a hardball.

Uphill Drill

Difficulty Level: Beginner

Setup: The pitcher will need their glove and a ball, and you'll also need a pitcher's mound and a partner.

Purpose: To help pitchers stay tall, reach, and get the elbow up and forward on the breaking ball.

Execution: Have the pitcher setup a couple of feet behind the rubber, so that they're throwing the pitch uphill. Their partner should be fairly close to minimize the stress on the arm while still getting a chance to improve technique.

Coaching Tips: It's important to remember that when you're working on mechanics, you can't work on command at the same time.



Figure 6.2: Pitcher striding forward uphill with a firm plant, focusing on good extension.

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