**CIRCLE PEAK (CP)**

Great Circle Peaks share several commonalities. First, the pitcher is in a reversed posture with the throwing shoulder slightly behind hips.Next, the glove arm is in a direct line of power with the catcher.And finally, the pitcher has achieved maximum travel distance from mound with drag foot contacting the ground.

Let’s take a look at our Pro Models, Jennie Finch and Lisa Fernandez. Jennie Finch has traveled maximum distance from the mound while maintaining foot contact with the ground. She is aligned on the power line and has reversed her posture. Her hips are open and her throwing shoulder is slightly behind her hips.

Lisa Fernandez shares the same Circle Peak characteristics. Lisa’s hips are open and she has traveled a maximum distance from the mound while her foot drags along the ground. She is in a reversed posture with her glove arm extended to the catcher creating a “K” position.

Deviations at the Circle Peak happen for several reasons. Let’s examine these reasons by asking assessment questions about your pitcher’s motion. And then our youth models will demonstrate the common problems and provide a working set of drills to help you find solutions.

**The first question to ask will be “Is the pitcher in a reverse posture with her throwing shoulder slightly behind the open hips?”**

If the answer is no, the pitcher’s hips may not be open. In this example, the pitcher’s arm is at Circle Peak but the hips are still closed to the catcher.

If the answer is no, the arm circle path might be off line. Here our pitcher is not loosely extending her arm. In this example, her elbow is bent. This places her throwing hand to the interior side of the ideal arm path.

If the answer is no, the pitcher is possibly leaning to the left or to the right. In this example, the ideal balance and alignment found at circle peak has been compromised by an off-line course and a leaning posture line.

And if the answer is no, the stacking of the hand, shoulder and hips might be out of order. Here our student model is not extending throwing hand directly above her throwing shoulder. And the throwing shoulder is not slightly behind opened hips.

**The next question to ask will be “Is the glove arm in a direct line of power with the catcher?”**

If the answer is no, the glove arm might be moving in a counterproductive direction. In this example, the pitching student has a misguided glove arm. Her glove arm is not helping the body form an “X” or “K” position and is therefore a force that is challenging the body’s ability to achieve an opened and aligned position.

**And the final question to ask will be “Has the pitcher achieved maximum travel distance from mound with drag foot contacting the ground?”**

If the answer is no, the stride leg might be beginning its decent to foot touch too early. Here our student model has not generated enough up and away force to achieve that maximum stride distance. She has limited push from the mound and has remained in her attacking posture too long.

Variations are acceptable in the Circle Peak. The glove arm placement might form an “X” or a “K” position. Both are acceptable. While pro models might customize the glove placement differently, they share successful commonalities of open hips, reversed posture and a maximized stride length.

If you discover that your pitching movements deviate from the fundamentals of our pro models, please refer to following Circle Peak drills.

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**Is the pitcher in reverse posture with throwing shoulder slightly behind hips?**

**Common Problem CP-1: Hips are not open**

**Solution CP-1a: Wall Trace – Circle Peak with Open Hips**

***Opening the hips will enable the hand contact with the wall at Circle Peak.***

*To execute the Wall Trace drill, the pitcher will stand approximately 4” from the wall, with a stance that is about shoulder width apart and parallel to the wall. Be sure to do a safety check on the wall for any protrusions. The Wall Trace will involve a smooth contact with the hand against the wall throughout the arm circle.*

*The focal point for this Wall Trace is Circle Peak. More specifically, are the hips opened enough to allow the pitcher to reverse her posture? Is her throwing shoulder slightly behind the hips? And are the hips open enough to allow the throwing arm to maintain constant contact with the wall?*

*A pitcher may lose contact in this phase if spacing and alignment are compromised. Use this drill to determine at what point deviation from the circle path happens. And then make appropriate adjustments to create an open hip position, reverse posture and palm contact with the wall.*

**Solution CP-1b: One Knee**

***Isolates the body in an open and reversed position to target the correct body posture and alignment at circle peak.***

*Removing the ability to stride will allow the pitcher to place greater focus on a specific target area. In this example, a one knee pitch is used to establish an open hip position with a reverse posture. The pitcher will isolate the body by kneeling on her throwing leg and by placing her stride foot in front at a width that will allow the posture line to naturally reverse. The throwing knee will be lined up with the stride foot. The stride foot will be on a 45 degree angle. The throwing arm will freely swing through the circle path and at Circle Peak, the pitcher can now focus on the reversing of posture and the placement of the throwing shoulder slightly behind the hips.*

**Solution CP-1c: One Leg Pitches**

***Creates a balance challenge and to win, a pitcher must engage the legs and core and most importantly, be in an open and reversed posture.***

*Balance and posture drills are critical to gaining body awareness. One leg pitching creates a balance challenge and to win, a pitcher must engage the legs and core. But most importantly, she must be in an open and reversed posture.*

*To throw One Leg Pitches, start on a flat surface, getting into an open position, place most of the body weight onto the throwing foot with the stride foot tapped back. Lift the glove arm first then lift the stride leg into the air with a slightly flexed knee. Make any posture adjustments necessary to be able to effectively balance. Staying on that slightly flexed throwing leg, make an arm circle and throw the pitch. Remain balanced on the throwing leg. Complete this several times without the ball and then add the ball.*

*To increase the challenge, stand on an elevated surface. In this example, we go up about 3.5” and balance on a 4x6 board. Once the pitcher becomes proficient at that, increase the balance challenge even more with a leather medicine ball. Be certain that a spotter is available. Begin in dry runs and eventually graduate to full pitch on the med ball. Be certain to focus on creating a reversed posture and keeping the hips open.*

**Common Problem CP-2: Arm circle path is off line**

**Solution CP-2a: Wall Trace – Circle Peak**

***Keeping the arm circle path online will enable the hand contact with the wall at Circle Peak.***

*To execute the Wall Trace drill, the pitcher will stand approximately 4” from the wall, with a stance that is about shoulder width apart and parallel to the wall. Be sure to do a safety check on the wall for any protrusions. The Wall Trace will involve a smooth contact with the hand against the wall throughout the arm circle.*

*The focal point for this drill is Circle Peak. More specifically, the pitcher will evaluate if the arm is creating an on-line circle path or if there is deviation from this line. A variety of reasons may cause the arm to lose contact with the wall. The causes could range from a bicep curl to a stride or stance that is off of the power line, from hips that have not properly opened to possibly a wrist that is attempting to unnaturally pull back into a pre-set snapping position.*

*A pitcher may lose contact in this phase if spacing and alignment are compromised. Use this drill to determine at what point deviation from the circle path happens. And then make appropriate adjustments to create an open hip position, reverse posture and palm contact with the wall at Circle Peak.*

**Common Problem CP-3: Pitcher leaning to left or right**

**Solution CP-3a: ISO-ID – Stacked and Balanced**

***Defines the intent of each part of the motion and achieves the balance, alignment and posture needed at Circle Peak.***

*This isolation ID is a two part drill. First the pitcher must choose an appropriate Pre Motion and Circle Start to be able to explode into First Quarter. The pitcher will then be asked to stick this First Quarter position with strength and accuracy. Pause. Evaluate. Now with a negative move (or use of the ground to restart), the pitcher will now explode to Circle Peak and hold. Evaluate balance, alignment and posture.*

*To be able to achieve and hold this position those three checkpoints must be in place. It’s important to emphasize that the intent the Pre Motion should be to get to a healthy place for Circle Start. The intent for a good Circle Start is to have a strong and extended First Quarter. The intent for the First Quarter is to be able to continue the hip rotation, to move forward and achieve a balanced and well postured Circle Peak. The ISO-ID drills focuses on intent and result of that effort.*

**Solution CP-3b: Head Adjustment**

***Manual assistance drill that pushes or pulls the head back into alignment with the power line.***

Balanced and forward movement along the power line is important to optimizing output. Any disruption to the forward flow of body’s balance will take away from the greatest potential summation of forces at release. When a pitcher’s head severely falls to the left or the right of the power line, the stride line and the body weight often follow the lean. To correct this head tilt, the head adjustment requires manual assistance from the coach. The coach must either stand on the floor or if the pitcher is tall, stand on an elevated surface that is stable. With her hand, the coach will place a guide on either the left or the right side of the pitcher’s head. Here she can do one of two things. For pitchers who lean to their throwing side, the coach can pull the head back onto the power line. For pitchers who tilt to their glove side, the coach can gently guide the head back over the center of the pitcher’s body. This will give an in-motion manual adjustment to correct this alignment issue.

**Common Problem CP-4: The stacking of the hand, shoulder and hip is out of order**

**Solution CP-4a: Arm Path Check - Circle Peak Tests**

***Provides a physical cue that safely evaluates the throwing arm path and extension at Circle Peak.***

*A foam noodle can give safe and instant feedback about the arm circle path and extension. This drill requires assistance from a coach who can either stand on the ground or up on an elevated platform.*

*Part One will test if the throwing arm has a healthy and elastic extension at Circle Peak. The noodle will be placed parallel to the ground and at an estimated height that will provide a light contact from the pitcher’s hand when the ball and hand are over the throwing shoulder. This height will vary from pitcher to pitcher. If the pitcher feels contact in this test, she receives safe and instant feedback about the good extension of her arm.*

*In Part Two, the coach will check for arm path alignment. Is the arm staying in a healthy power line or has is deviated from course? Holding the noodle above the pitcher’s head and in a line running parallel to the power line, the coach can set up the test for the glove side or the throwing side to check alignment to both left and right of the power line. Making contact with the foam in this case is negative feedback. The pitcher will want to feel a clean line to the catcher to be successful in this phase of Circle Peak.*

**Solution CP-4b: Stretch the Pitch**

***Breathing and elongating the motion thru a full stretch gives the arm the time, space and independence it needs.***

*When a pitcher is in an open position at circle peak, the posture should be reversed and the ball and pitching hand will ideally be directly above the shoulder. When the pitcher is not in this position, it may be for a variety of reasons such as rushed timing, bicep curling, a lack of flexibility, tension, the holding of breath, or from falling off of the power line. In these cases, the arm is battling to be on time with the body at release and will do whatever is necessary to cut corners to get there.*

*With this drill, we are trying to elongate the circle path and provide enough time for the body to move effortlessly and successfully. Stretching the Pitch gives the arm circle the time, space and independence it needs to function as the body elongates and trusts a slight delay in foot touch. It integrates a deep breath and a tension release. The Stretch the Pitch asks the pitcher imitate a full body good morning stretch with a long inhale and exhale.*

**Solution CP-4c: K Drill – Throwing Arm**

***Isolates the moment when the ball and pitching hand are directly above the shoulder.***

*The K Drill begins pitch at the moment when the pitcher is in reverse posture and her throwing shoulder is slightly behind the hip. The focus of this drill is on the ball and pitching hand being directly above the shoulder at Circle Peak. To execute, stand on the power line with hips open. Extend the glove arm to the catcher, lift the stride leg and load weight onto the throwing leg. Slightly reverse the posture. And finally, extend the ball and hand above the throwing shoulder. Pause and gather balance. Then, transfer forward allowing the angles of energy to release in sequence through the ball to the target.*

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**Is the glove arm in a direct line of power with the catcher?**

**Common Problem CP-5: Glove arm is not directing power to the catcher**

**Solution CP-5a: K Drill – Glove Arm**

***Isolates the moment when the glove arm is extended and aligned directly to the catcher.***

*The K Drill begins pitch at the moment when the pitcher is in reverse posture with her throwing shoulder slightly behind the hip. The focus of this drill is on the glove arm being extended and aligned directly to the catcher. To execute, stand on the power line with hips open. Extend the glove arm to the catcher, lift the stride leg and load weight onto the throwing leg. Slightly reverse the posture. And finally, extend the ball and hand above the throwing shoulder. Pause and gather balance. Then, transfer forward allowing the angles of energy to release in sequence through the ball to the target.*

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**Is there maximum travel distance from mound with drag foot contacting the ground?**

**Common Problem CP-6: Stride leg is beginning decent to foot touch too early**

**Solution CP-6a: Assisted Pitches with Extended Angled Bungee – Upright to Reverse**

***Using a harness to pull the pitcher away and up will increase the flight time needed for timely foot touch.***

*The Assisted Sprint Drill attaches a harness around the pitcher’s waist and from the front, assistance is given through a bungee cord pull. The cord is affixed to the glove side of the waist and held by the coach or can also be attached to a wall or pole. Place the cord on a slightly upward angle. This will help the pitcher gain the up and away flight time needed in the stride for a good foot touch. This drill can be done with or without the ball. If using the ball, hold or affix the cord through a protective screen with the holder on the opposite side of the pitcher. If affixed to the wall, the pitcher should extend the bungee back as far as possible to get maximum pull when released into the positive move. If the coach is holding the bungee, she can manipulate the amount of pull needed to make the drill a success.*

**Solution CP-6b: Stride Length Challenger**

***A goal setting challenge to maximize stride length***

*At circle peak, the pitcher should be seeking to travel a maximum distance from the mound as the drag foot is still in contact with the ground. A combination of drive from the throwing leg and a forceful swing from the stride leg will achieve an optimal stride length. Take this challenge: Determine the length of your body by lying on the ground, placing your toes on the mound and extending forward to the plate. Place a marker one foot in front of your head and off to your throwing side where it’s visible but in a place that you will not step on it. As you pitch try to land at or beyond that marker and continue to move it farther away from the mound each time you land beyond your goal. Continue the work to beat your personal best with each pitch.*