**CIRCLE START (CS)**

Great Circle Starts share several commonalities. First, the pitcher should be in an attacking posture. Next, the pitching arm is loose and extended below the throwing shoulder. And finally, the throwing foot should begin to rotate to assist with opening the hips as the glove leg begins its drive forward.

Let’s take a look at our Pro Models, Jennie Finch and Lisa Fernandez. Jennie Finch assumes a narrow stance in her set position. She chooses a split arm back swing in her Pre Motion as she sets an attacking posture with an upper body lean. Jennie then uses the ground with a strong negative move and begins the positive move with her arms and body into the Circle Start. Here Jennie is in an attacking posture with her arms loosely below her shoulders as she begins the forward drive.

Lisa Fernandez takes on a wider approach by straddling the pitching rubber. She chooses an arm swing that sets momentum on her throwing side. As she creates an aggressive upper body attacking posture, she slides her throwing foot to the center of the mound and begins to open her hips. This slide step is important for realigning onto the direct path of force to the target. She has bend in her knees and weight on the balls of her feet as she begins the positive move into her Circle Start. At Circle Start, Lisa is in an attacking posture, her arm is directly below her throwing shoulder and her throwing foot has begun to rotate to open her hips as she starts her drive forward.

Deviations in the Circle Start 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’s posture still in an attacking position?**

If the answer is no, the pitcher may be in an upright posture. Here our pitcher remains or returns to the same height as her initial stance. Standing tall during this phase will prevent the pitcher from creating an attacking line along her spine and a strong forward drive into the pitch.

**The next question to ask will be “Is the pitching arm loose and extended below the throwing shoulder?”**

If the answer is no, the pitcher’s arm might be too tight. In this example, the pitcher’s arm swing is guarded and locked. It is not producing the free and independent swing needed to create momentum.

And if the answer is no, the pitcher may have an off-line backswing. In this example, the student has taken her backswing to the external side of her body. As she approaches Circle Start the arm is not loosely aligned back under her throwing shoulder because she is following an arm path that is crossing her body instead of swinging to the target.

**And the final question to ask will be “Is the throwing foot beginning to rotate to assist hip opening?”**

If the answer is no, the pitcher’s drive foot may be flat with little push to rotation. Here our student pitcher is not taking that extra moment of time to invest in the resources from the ground. She is immediately moving forward to the target without bending and gathering the energy that is under her push foot. She has missed the opportunity to start the Kinetic chain with a push to rotation.

Variations are acceptable in the Circle Start. The throwing arm and glove arm might be together or separate. Split arm swings, side arm swings to no backswing at all, pitchers choose exit strategies that gather energy. The hips will also vary in the degree to which they are open or closed. While Jennie and Lisa customize their Circle Start movements differently, they both share successful commonalities.

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

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**Is body posture still in an attacking position?**

**Common Problem CS-1: Upright posture**

**Solution CS-1a: Run-Up Drill on Attack**

***Develops momentum and attack prior to circle start.***

*The Run-Up Drill gets the body into running form prior to the actual start of the arm circle. The pitcher begins behind the mound and with either a single or multiple step running start, hits the mound in a very aggressive and attacking posture that helps to guide the arm to circle start. This drill is similar to the Rocker Start in baserunning, where momentum and attack is developed prior to the foot driving off of the base. In this example, we used the Softball Power Drive. With this tool, the pitcher will receive the benefit of training deeper angles in the throwing leg and will also hear the click that indicates the timing of the use of the ground. This drill can also be done very effectively on the mound without a Softball Power Drive. The primary focus on this Run-Up Drill is the attack position that enables a strong positive move.*

**Solution CS-1b: Attack to Reverse Lateral Drill**

***Identifies two important posture positions by setting a strong attack angle and releasing to reverse angle.***

*Setting and releasing angles can simply be defined as gathering and sending power. The Attack to Reverse Lateral Drill focuses on the set and release of these two very important posture positions. Because the pitcher will work in a lateral stance (meaning the hips are open), the drill provides the simplicity to allow focus only on moving from one angle to another – attack to reverse to attack to reverse. The pitcher will stay strong in her legs for the entire segment and should verbalize the words “attack” and “reverse” with each transfer. Encourage the pitcher to imagine that there is a line drawn from her eye to her belly button. That line should move from an attack angle to a reverse angle and back to attack each time a lateral stride transfer is made.*

**Solution CS-1c: 3 Ball Drill (center/front/center/back) – Attack Focus**

***Controlled and rhythmic multiple pitch series that focuses on the attack to reverse angle exchange.***

*Rhythm. Timing. Coordination. The Set and Release of Angles. Controlled Aggression. Endurance. The 3 Ball Drill can accomplish all of these training elements. To execute this drill, the pitcher will start facing the catcher with a ball in her throwing hand and one in her glove. The catcher will start with a ball in her throwing hand. The goal is to create a nonstop exchange where the pitcher sets a tone by establishing strong, controlled and rhythmic strides and having a consistent release. Challenge the pitcher and catcher to keep this series going as long as possible without stopping. As the pitcher becomes proficient, require her to give more attention to the attacking posture on the “back” and the reverse posture on the “front”.*

**Solution CS-1d: Sprinter Height Check**

***Creates focus on the attacking posture of the start by placing a height restriction.***

*To trigger the pitcher’s awareness of height and posture as she exits the mound, place a height restriction in front of the mound. A foam noodle can give safe and instant feedback for attaining this attacking posture. In this drill, a coach who is standing on the pitcher’s glove side will hold the foam noodle parallel to the ground, about 2 feet in front of the pitcher, and approximately one foot lower than her body height. The pitcher will begin her motion making sure that she angles her body and drives from a lower center of mass off of the mound. If she stands up too early, her forehead will make contact with the noodle giving the feedback to stay lower on that initial drive.*

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**Is the pitching arm loose and extended below the throwing shoulder?**

**Common Problem CS-2: Tight and dependent arms**

**Solution CS-2a: Pendulum**

***The arms swing freely back and forth like a pendulum prior to throwing the pitch.***

*A pendulum is something hanging from a fixed point which, when pulled back and released, is free to swing back and forth under the influence of gravity. Through multiple arm swings the Pendulum drill provides the pitcher the time to allow her arm to be loose and extended below the throwing shoulder. As the arm swings back and forth, feel how the shoulder can unlock and allow the arm to move freely. In this demonstration, we used three pendulum swings to prepare for entry into the circle. 1 – 2 – 3 and pitch. If the pitcher needs more time to establish a loose swing prior to starting the pitch, you can add to the number of swings. Ask the pitcher to compare or contrast the difference between tension levels in the pendulum swings versus the actual pitch.*

**Common Problem CS-3: Arm not extended below the throwing shoulder**

**Solution CS-3a: Angle Check with Restart**

***A self-check to evaluate if posture and movement choices in pre motion are helpful to the arm circle start***

*When the arm enters the circle, it is important that the body is in a position of strength. If the pre motion to circle start movement with the body isn’t moving with the intention of assisting the arm into the circle, the motion will suffer a loss of power. The pitcher wants to use the attacking posture and its associated energy to promote a long, free and gradual acceleration of the arm circle. The Angle Check with Restart allows the pitcher to assess if the pre motion choices of posture and movement are helping the arm circle or distracting the arm circle. This is an evaluation drill. The pitcher will set, swing and stop. At this point, ask the following question: “Is this the ultimate position for me to deliver a strong and on-time pitch?” And if the body is strong and the arm is extended below the throwing shoulder, the answer is “yes”. Then, restart the motion with ground energy and complete the pitch. Repeat this exercise until the circle start angle is most effective.*

**Solution CS-3b: Flapper – Long Arm in Entry**

***Provides an audio and physical tool to check for an on-line, long and rhythmic arm swing.***

*Using both audio and physical cues, the Flapper creates awareness of the timing and path of arm’s backswing and upswing. Cut a piece of duct tape approximately 18” long. Pinch the middle of the tape into a 3” section. Affix the two remaining adhesive ends to the bottom of the pitcher’s shorts, or on pants, to the middle of the thigh. When freely swinging the arm straight back and forth the pitcher should feel the “hit” against the tape as well as hear the associated sound. Begin a well-timed back and upswing sequence sounding like “Hit, Hit, Pitch” or to the beat of “1,2,3” creating a natural rhythm (or metronome) for the motion. To hit the flapper more consistently, the pitcher may need to adjust any deviations in the arm path.*

***In this specific Flapper drill, the “1” and “2” counts of the backswing and upswing must be long. To stretch the length of the arm swing even more, move the flapper lower to a place a few inches above the knee. Hitting the flapper twice in this zone will improve the length of the arm below the shoulder in circle start.***

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**Is the throwing foot beginning to rotate to assist hip opening?**

**Common Problem CS-4: Flat foot with little push to rotation**

**Solution CS-4a: The Linebacker OFF**

***Optimizing the use of the push foot to achieve maximum up and away drive against a resisted pad.***

*To generate maximum force, a pitcher must tap into the energy from the ground, move it along the kinetic chain and throw it out of the hands. The throwing foot must start this process by beginning to rotate as it pushes from the mound. The energy then moves up into the throwing leg to drive up and away. A flat foot that has little push to rotation will not be able to gather and send maximum force from the ground. The Linebacker OFF drill forces the pitcher to generate initial energy from the push foot and as it drives and turns it sends it through the legs, core, arms and hands. Be sure to push the resistance pad and the holder up and away not straight forward. This will give the time and fuel to get onto the power line, to open the hips and land in a strong reverse posture. Saying the word “OFF” will also integrate proper breathing techniques which release tension and increase power. You can also use a heavy bag to do this drill.*

**Solution CS-4b: Kinetic Chain Thru Med Ball**

***Trigger the kinetic chain from the foot through the hands by throwing medicine ball from mound.***

*To generate maximum force, a pitcher must tap into the energy from the ground, move it along the kinetic chain and throw it out of the hands. The throwing foot gets the energy from the ground, moves it up though the leg, through the core, into the arms and out of the fingers. The throwing foot must begin this process by beginning to rotate as it pushes from the mound. A flat foot that has little push to rotation will not be able to gather and send maximum force from the ground. The Kinetic Chain Thru Med Ball drill requires the pitcher to generate initial energy from the push foot and as it drives and turns it sends it through the legs, core, arms and hands. Be sure to push the medicine ball up and away not straight forward. The med ball will be thrown approximately 20 feet. This will give the time and fuel to get onto the power line, to open the hips and land in a strong reverse posture. This correct posture must be set prior to the commitment of foot touch. The medicine ball, weighing between 4-8 pounds will provide a test of the quality of power being generated from the ground. If thrown incorrectly, the stride will set foot touch posture down too early and too forward. If power has been generated properly, the pitcher will have the time and capability to land in an optimal position to throw a strong pitch.*